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BLACK SPIRITS
AND
WHITE

BY
FRANCIS
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BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

BY

FRANCES ELEANOR TROLLOPE,

AUTHOR OF "AUNT MARGARET'S TROUBLE," "A CHARMING FELLOW,"
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

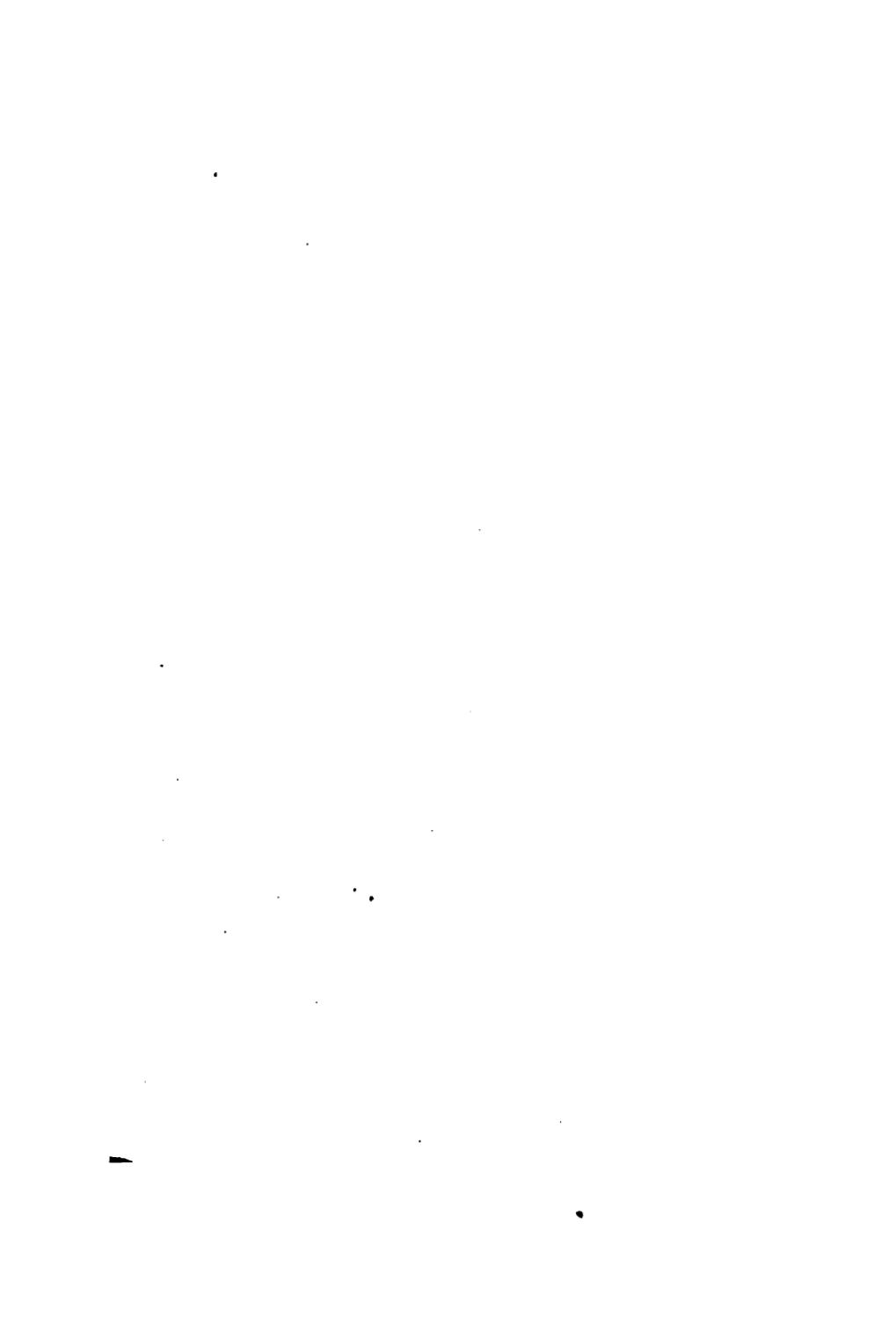


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BLACK SPIRITS AND WHITE.

CHAPTER I.

THE passion of love, like the sunshine and the rain, falls upon the just and unjust. It distinguishes not between the ugly and the beautiful, the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish. It inspires all sorts and conditions of men either with light that transfigures, or fire that scorches ; and furnishes the theme for more varieties of the human drama than are enumerated by Polonius—including the “tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited.” All the world is agreed that love, in the beautiful young damsels and noble youths of romantic aspect, is a fitting subject for poetic treatment ; and that even in the humbler classes it may (any too rough and

rustic details being duly kept in the back-ground) inspire sweet pastorals in prose and verse. But the god knows no such limitations as his eulogists. He is as universal as the air ; nay, he seems to please himself by selecting the unlikeliest subjects for the full exercise of his power.

Obadiah Flagge would certainly have been deemed an unlikely subject for love by nine persons out of ten. "A crafty customer ; a fellow who knew which side his bread was buttered ; a cool card ; a regular Yankee humbug ; a low schemer ;"—such were some of the epithets by which Obadiah Flagge was frequently described. Even those who believed in his power, not only to "call spirits from the vasty deep," but to make them come at his call, by no means credited the self-styled Doctor with any lofty qualities of mind or heart. It was curious, they said, to see how entirely the mediumistic power was disconnected from moral or intellectual worth. There were clearly certain occult physical conditions on which mediumship depended. Flagge was vulgar. Oh yes, certainly ! He was ignorant, cunning, far from disinterested, possibly an habitual liar, probably unscrupulous in eking out his genuine gifts by impos-

ture ; *but* he was a medium. One could not explain it.

His most gullible clients delivered up the man's character to you without a struggle. Their candour and liberality in this respect were quite astonishing. So was their faith. But if you had told any of these same individuals that Obadiah Flagge was an unhappy lover, they would have laughed the statement to scorn. That, indeed, would have been too much for their credulity. Dr. Flagge ready to sacrifice his interests for a romantic passion ? The idea was too absurd ; too unlikely. It would be a curious speculation to inquire on what some persons found their theory of probability. Experience would appear to have little to do with it, since facts loudly pronounced to be unlikely, are constantly occurring with most obstinate pertinacity.

At all events love, impartial as the sun and the rain, cared nothing for the absurdity or unlikelihood of the notion, but caused Obadiah Flagge to endure many a heartache, many a hot and cold fit of hope and despair, and to thrill at the sound of a voice and the sight of a face, as much as if he had been handsome, noble, young, possessed of twenty thousand a year and the entrée into the most

aristocratic society. He had felt something like timidity in anticipating what would be C^Enone's mood when she discovered that he was living in the same house with her. Would she be angry? Would she be disgusted? Would she insist on removing herself from his neighbourhood? For three or four days he abstained from attempting to see her. Nay, once, when he thought she was passing down the stairs, he hastily shut the door of his sitting-room and hid himself: feeling afterwards very unreasonably disappointed when, on opening the door again in a second or two, and peeping out, he saw, instead of C^Enone, the eldest Czernovic girl, who turned to smile and nod at him. But his self-denial gave way after a short time, and he went upstairs to pay a visit to Papa Czernovic.

C^Enone received him with quiet indifference. Yes; she had learned that he lived in that house, she said, almost immediately after her arrival there. Had she been angry? No; why angry? He could not help living there. It was a chance. It did not matter. Flagge tried to flatter himself that in this indifference there was some indication that C^Enone was becoming reconciled to his presence. And

being reconciled to his presence meant being, in some measure, reconciled to his suit. "She knows right well that I keep on loving her, same as I keep on breathing, and if she can only get used to the idea ! If it was so dreadful to her as she used to say it was, surely she'd never bear to see me constantly around, and be so calm and gentle. She's kinder in her ways to me than she was, too." So ran Flagge's reflections in the main, although dashed here and there with fits of despondency.

But he did not know that CEnone's calm endurance of his presence resulted chiefly from the hope she nourished of speedily being carried far away from him, and from all the persons associated with her present life. She lived on the expectation of a letter from her father, and counted the days to discover when it would be possible to receive one from him. This hope had become the point on which her thoughts concentrated themselves, and it grew stronger day by day, and more over-mastering. It was an outlet, an escape, from troubles near at hand. There were very few topics connected with her life in England which did not carry a sting in them for CEnone. The kind hands which had given her generous

gifts had unconsciously brought poison with them. Friendship and gratitude contended against jealousy and pride; and love itself had put a cup of bitterness to her lips. Her youth still asserted itself in the eagerness with which she looked for her father's answer to her letter. Somewhere, at some time, lurking a long way off, in the dim vistas of the future, there might be—if not happiness, yet—peace. The weakness of her body made her instinctively turn that hope into an image of rest, which in one more strongly animated by health would have assumed the form of active enjoyment. "She'll get used to the idea of me loving her," thought Flagge. The truth was that she was getting used to another and very different idea: the idea of an existence in far foreign lands, in a world apart from the world where she had known him. Her mental vision scarcely wandered from two subjects of contemplation;—in the past, Vincent Maude and the scenes in her poor existence wherein he had figured; in the future, her father, and the scenes she hoped to dwell amidst with him. About the present she concerned herself but little. When her attention did rest on those around her, she felt as one feels who knows himself to be on

the eve of an eternal separation. It is easy to tolerate that which we are about to part from for ever. Yet a little while, and all these figures would recede from her as the cities and the shore recede from a ship putting out to sea. There was a softening influence in the thought. And then moreover,—C^Enone was scarcely conscious of it, but there was a subtle balm for wounded pride and sensitive egotism in the love so lavishly given to her by this man whom she looked down on. She told herself that she wished from her soul he did not love her: and she told herself truly. But yet there was so much of unheroic human nature in poor C^Enone, that to know herself genuinely loved, even by Dr. Flagge the medium, was sometimes as a cordial draught to her spirit.

Flagge, however, being ignorant of C^Enone's hope of leaving England, did not guess that her gentleness to him was the gentleness of an eternal farewell. By degrees he took the habit of going to sit with her during the hours when the Czernovics were at their afternoon concert. He had discovered that there was one pleasure which he could give her: C^Enone was passionately fond of flowers; and flowers in a great city are a luxury unattainable by

narrow purses. Flagge daily brought a flower to CEnone. It did not occur to her that, in taking a dainty hot-house blossom from Dr. Flagge, she was accepting a costly gift. She was very ignorant of many of the details of daily life; for although poverty is in general an efficient teacher as to the value of money, yet CEnone had been shielded from learning it by personal experience, thanks to the Czernovics. "Doing without things,"—pretty, pleasant, and artistic things,—had made up the sum of her sufferings from poverty. The struggle to get necessaries with scanty means, she had never known. She had, indeed, an idea that elegant bouquets such as were thrown to a *prima donna* on the stage, or carried by a belle in a ball-room, were expensive luxuries. But a simple Gardenia, or camellia, or white moss-rose, or a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, suggested no thought of its money-value to her. And then Flagge offered them in a quiet, matter-of-fact way. Sometimes he took them from the button-hole of his coat; sometimes he brought them in his hand. Generally he would lay his flower down on the table beside her, or place it in a glass of water, without a word. Love is, perhaps, a still more efficient teacher than

poverty, and love had taught Flagge some subtle and delicate traits of behaviour towards OEnone.

Three weeks had elapsed since a letter had been despatched directed in OEnone's hand-writing to Signor Spiridion Balassopoulo, care of a Greek banker in Constantinople ; and the girl's impatient longing for an answer possessed her like a disease. But she consumed herself in silence, being averse to taking any of the Czernovics into her inmost confidence, and having a proud disinclination to complain, under all circumstances. And so the days went by, and their chief incidents for OEnone came to be the appearance of Dr. Flagge and his hot-house flower.

"Guess you might come out of this everlasting old rat-trap, Nony, and get a breath of air," said he one day, as he placed an exquisite white hyacinth on the table beside which OEnone sat at work.

"Air?" she repeated, with a significant glance out of the window.

"Well, that's true, too," returned Flagge. "'Tain't much of air, and less of sunshine, that's to be had in this coaly climate. But to-day the atmosphere is a trifle more diluted than usual. I mean you might ladle it out

with a spoon 'stead of cutting it with a chopper. And there's a patch of pale lemon-colour visible above the chimney-tops, which the natives suppose to be the sun. And it froze in the night, and the ice in the parks will bear skaters. And altogether it's what they call in these diggings a fine day. And I don't see as you mightn't as well come out for half an hour, any way."

"No; I shall not go out."

"It would do you good, Nony. You look whiter than that hyacinth."

"How sweet it is!" she exclaimed, touching it—almost caressing it—with the tips of her fingers. "And how beautiful!"

"I am real glad you like it, Nony," said poor Flagge, anxious to persuade himself that her words implied some approbation of the giver as well as the gift.

"Like it! No; that is not the word. It is a poem: a thing to be adored and taken into one's heart. Things so beautiful have something sacred in them. "After a moment or two, a sudden thought seemed to strike her, and, turning to Flagge she asked abruptly, "Where do you get these flowers?"

"Oh—where do I get 'em? I get 'em in Covent Garden, from a—a friend of mine."

"Does he sell them?"

"Well,—not to me. He's used to supply the Duchess of Belturbet when she's in town, and he knows me right well. I never go by his store but he sticks a flower in my button-hole. Sometimes I give him a cigar. But he ain't much of a smoker."

"But people do pay a great deal of money in London for such flowers as this," persisted OEnone.

"Well, I b'lieve they do, when they can't get 'em for nothing," returned Flagge, coolly. Then he added, bending slightly forward, towards the flower which OEnone was still touching. "'Tis a pretty bit of moulding in wax:—real cunning!"

But that the eulogium was intended less for the hyacinth than for the delicate hand which caressed it, the reader may perhaps divine, although OEnone never guessed it. Then his glance rested on her thin, wan face; and he reluctantly acknowledged to himself how sadly it was changed, and how the stamp of suffering had been deepened in it even within the last few weeks. "I do wish you'd try to get out into the air, Nony," he said once more.

"Why?"

"'Cos you look to be in need of it. You look—kinder fagged."

"And why should you suppose that to walk out in these dreary streets would make me look less fagged? Besides,—I can't walk now; I get so tired."

The words gave him a sharp pain at the heart. "Well, but you ought to get the air, anyhow," he said. "If you were well wrapped up,—I've got a buffalo robe somewhere, that 'ud do first-rate to cover you over in a carriage,—you might have a ride."

"Do you mean that I should take a drive? You are dreaming. How am I to take drives?"

He would fain have answered, "By letting me pay for them," but he did not dare.

"Would you drive with Miss Rosamond if she came here for you?"

"They would not let her come. Besides, this is all idle. I don't wish to go out. I am tired. I shall stay quiet here."

Flagge made up his mind that if the spirits retained any influence over Lady Lowry, they should induce her to send the carriage for Oenone before long. But he said no word of the sort. "Why, it's my belief as England don't agree with you, Nony," he observed. "A warmer climate would set you up, famous."

The words touched a chord that was easily set vibrating.

"Yes," she answered, with unusual quickness of response. "Yes; another climate,—sunshine,—and great mountains or the sea to look at instead of these black crowded walls!"

Flagge's face brightened. "Guess that's jest about what's the matter, Nony," said he eagerly. "Sunshine, and soft breezes, and the almighty big hills. California, now;—there's not a climate in the world to beat California. And then the flowers——!"

But Oenone had relapsed into languid indifference, and did not respond. He sat watching her, and not speaking again until it should please her to speak, with an humble self-effacement that was the more eloquent from its contrast with the usual demeanour of the man. All at once Oenone raised her wonderful dark eyes, and looking full at him asked, "Do the spirits come to you in dreams?"

"Why, no; I can't say as they do. Although I have had queer dreams too, before now."

"Dreams of warning?"

"Sometimes."

"Dreams that told you things you wished to know?"

Flagge paused for a second or two before answering. "Look here, Nony! I remember of you saying something to me once about speaking the truth right out at all hazards, and I'll do it;—to *you*, any way. I can't say as I've ever had dreams as were of any use or help to me. I have had strange kind of sensations in my sleep of being carried up out of my body, and floated around, and seeing myself lying there on my bed all the time. But whether it was really my spirit unloosened from the flesh, or jest a dream,—I dunno. To some folks I wouldn't own as much, but I tell you the truth."

"Enone sat with her hands folded over the sewing which she had let fall on her lap, looking at him abstractedly. "You never," she said in a low voice, "see a spirit that comes in your sleep to tell you things; that returns again in the same shape and with the same words; and that will not be disregarded or forgotten?"

"That's not a common case," said Flagge. He was perplexed and surprised by her manner.

"But it happens."

"Yes? Well,—yes! I s'pose it may happen."

"It has happened to me."

He instinctively refrained from exclaiming aloud, or showing any strong emotion, but he was greatly surprised, and not a little curious. Enone went on after an instant's silence:

"I tried for some time to put it out of my mind, and to think it merely a dream like another, that came by chance, and would cease by chance. But it persists. And, as I might not be here to speak myself—I—I have thought that perhaps I ought to tell some one:—you perhaps."

She spoke in a musing tone, as if she were rather debating a question within her own mind, than taking counsel of another.

"Nony," said Flagge, "I dunno as there's anything I *can* do or say to be of use to you; —I wish to God there might be! But if you will only let me try, you'll do me a kindness that I shall be grateful for!"

His voice supplied any fervour that might be lacking in his words, and Enone was startled back into haughty reserve in a moment.

"You can do nothing for me," she answered.

"If the matter concerned myself, I should not speak of it to you."

"You're hard,—cruel hard, Nony," he said, while a quick flush of pain covered his sallow face. "I don't believe I've quite deserved that at your hands. If there's a man on earth who would hold his own feelings in a tighter grip for fear of hurting yours than I've done, and do——! But I don't complain of that, Nony," he added, hastily interrupting himself, "nor I don't mean to reproach you. Whatever you say I ought to do, I'll try to carry it through. And if there's anything you choose to confide to me, it'll be kept safe and silent until you give me leave to speak. I can hold my tongue. It ain't a common accomplishment, nor yet an easy one; but my life hasn't been a common nor an easy life, and it's taught me that anyhow."

"Yes; I think I ought to speak. I might not be at hand by-and-by,—and it might be too late——"

Flagge waited, leaning his head on his hand, and looking, not at C^En^On^E, but at the dull fire in the grate.

"See,—you will promise me to keep what I am going to say secret?"

"Yes, Nony; I could swear it if you liked,

but if you don't trust me without an oath, you wouldn't trust me with one :—and you'd be right enough, too."

"Listen, then. The second night I slept here after leaving the Lowrys' house, I had a dream. I dreamt of the old man who died, and whose will they are looking for."

Flagge moved one of his legs that was crossed over the other with a quick jerk, and glanced for an instant at Oenone. But he said nothing.

"Well, I was not greatly impressed by that at first, because my mind had been full of all the talk about the will, and—and some one had been speaking to me of it that very day ; and I thought that had brought the dream. But the next night it came again, clearer and stronger; and again the next night ;—and every night ! "

"Strange ! And do you see the old man ? "

"I see a face,—a pale wrinkled face,—coming out of a kind of mist. At first the face used to be dim ; but now it is clear and vivid, like a transparent picture with a light behind it."

"Why do you think that the face is the face of Sir Rupert Lowry ? "

"It is like a portrait of him that Miss

Lowry wears in a bracelet, only older, and besides,—I have an irresistible, inexplicable conviction that it is he."

" Does he speak ? "

" At first he did not. But latterly he has spoken every night, always saying the same words, in a strange voice that seems to float in the air above his head, instead of issuing from his lips."

" What does he say ? " said Flagge, almost in a whisper. He was greatly impressed and disquieted. He had juggled with the supernatural, as a conjuror juggles with a pack of cards ; but Superstition lurks in the dark corners of many a mind where Reverence has no abiding place.

" He says, ' Search the walnut desk.' "

" The walnut desk ! That's in the study at Lowry Place. I've heard Lady Lowry speak of it a score of times ! "

So had OEnone. And my lady had heard the " spirits " speak of it through Dr. Flagge's mediumship ; describing the study and the walnut-wood desk with considerable accuracy, almost in her own words, to her great wonderment and admiration, and to the confirmation of her faith in Dr. Flagge.

" Now I think," pursued OEnone, " that the

missing will must be in existence, and must be there, and that Sir Rupert lays upon me the charge of discovering it. I *think* so ; but I may be wrong ; I may be the victim of a delusion. I ask myself why should I be chosen for this task ? And then I remember Lady Lowry said that the communications from Sir Rupert were generally given by me when I was in the magnetic sleep."

Flagge winced a little. He knew how much of the communications which he had been used to repeat to Lady Lowry had really been uttered by OEnone. But this knowledge did not make him the less liable to be impressed by OEnone's dream. He felt somewhat like the ghost-seer who, preparing to raise a counterfeit phantom, is aghast at the unexpected and awful apparition of a real one. Then, too, this discovery opened to his imagination the possibility of extracting much money from the Lowrys. It was a golden gate to fortune ;—or might be, if he dared to use it. He felt his promise to OEnone as a trammel already.

"What shall you do?" he asked her abruptly.

"I have tried to decide, but it is difficult. You may think it easy enough. You may

say, ‘Go and tell Sir Cosmo Lowry your dream simply and straightforwardly, and it will soon be known whether it be a true revelation or not.’”

“No; I’m not sure as I should exactly say that,” returned Flagge drily; thinking within himself that such ingenuous measures were not calculated for dealing profitably with Sir Cosmo Lowry. Then he said, “As to the walnut desk, that’s just the very place they’re sure to look in. My lady’s head was running on nothing else but that desk all the time.”

“I do not wish to appear in the matter. I—do you think the finding of the will would be bad for Miss Lowry?”

“She ain’t likely to find it particularly pleasant to lose money and house, I should think!”

“I wish I never had known or heard about this! I wish I had never known the Lowrys!”

“I’d say so too, Nony;—if it wasn’t that I used to see you there.”

“Will you do this:—will you keep yourself informed of what goes on at Lowry Place, and will you, if the paper they are in search of cannot be found, urge them to look once again

in the walnut desk,—even to take it to pieces ? ”

“ Lady Sarah won’t require much urging to do that, Nony ! If her sister-in-law ’ll let her, she’ll pull the house to pieces rather than give up.”

“ Will you do what I ask ? ”

“ If it’s for your sake, Nony,—yes.”

“ For the sake of right and justice.”

“ Well,—no ; I guess *not*. How do I know where right and justice lie ? I know that I’d do anything on earth for you, though. There’s no element of uncertainty about *that* ! ”

After a short hesitation, CEnone agreed to let the matter rest on that ground. Flagge was triumphant at having gained so much. CEnone had begged him to do something for her sake. That meant a great deal, he thought. On her part, she reflected that she would soon be far away, and it was not worth while to struggle for a word. “ And how soon may I tell Lady Lowry ? ” asked Flagge, getting up off his chair.”

“ As soon as you hear the search has been vain, and has been given up.”

“ And, Nony,—do let me ask you one question, won’t you ? ”

“ Well ? ”

" You said a word about not being here by-and-by, and not being at hand to speak ; now I want to know if you've made up any plans, or what was in your mind, Nony. You must know how it weighs on my heart when I hear you talk like that. I can't help it."

Œnone paused for a minute looking at him. "I might die, you know," she said, "and carry the dream away with me."

" Die, Nony ! "

" Yes ; did you think I should never die ? But there is no need to look so frightened I should not be frightened,—nor even sorry,—if I were told that I must die to-morrow. Go away now, please."

And Flagge went away with a sense of oppression at his heart ; but with his brain busily occupied by a hundred schemes and conjectures.

CHAPTER II.

SARAH, Lady Lowry, was not given to meditate upon abstract questions, nor to the indulgence of unprofitable curiosity as to the hidden causes of any phenomena, social or other, which met her observation. Else might she have speculated somewhat as to the kind of life which Dr. Flagge the medium led, during what may be called the subterranean portion of his existence ; and have investigated a little the sources of the knowledge he possessed about things interesting to the House of Lowry.

Mr. Quickit, indeed, was proved to have given the most important bit of information yet revealed on the subject of Sir Rupert's will. But Lady Lowry's faith in the medium was preserved by an anachronism. She represented the transaction to herself thus : Dr. Flagge was told of the will by the spirits,

and Mr. Quickit confirmed what they said. Whereas the real chronology of the matter was that Dr. Flagge had first heard of the missing will from Mr. Quickit, and the spirits had confirmed what *he* said. But my lady clung to a theory which was consonant with her wishes, prejudices, and self-conceit ; and the spirit theory flattered all these. She wished her husband to be master of Lowry Place ; she had nursed various prejudices against Mary until they flourished with extraordinary vigour and obstinacy ; and her vanity was gratified by the notion that affection and esteem for herself had mainly moved the spirit of the proud and stiff-necked old baronet to communicate with his family.

Percy Wigmore observed with an almost infantine expression of countenance, that “ it had got to be reg’lar mania with Lady Lowry about the spirits, don’t you know ? ” “ Jove ! ” said he, “ I never was more surprised than at her goin’ in like that for ‘em. I like ‘em myself, in moderation, and in a quiet way, ” added Percival candidly, as if the spirits in question had been of an alcoholic nature. “ But not to go in for ‘em to that extent. It becomes a noosance. And—and ‘pon my soul a feller, might get into a scrape goin’

revealin' and accusin', and all that, don't you know?"

Mrs. Wigmore demanded of him, with some acerbity of manner, what sort of scrape he imagined the spirits could bring Lady Lowry into ; adding that for her part she was sure Lady Lowry had the cunning of her class—the sort of thing one found in servants and people of that kind, and was able to take care of herself very perfectly. From which it will be seen that the warmth of the Honourable Alexandrina's friendship for our Sarah had cooled down to a very low temperature. Still it must not be supposed that Mrs. Wigmore spoke to her friend in anything like the same arctic tone which she used in speaking *of* her. Mrs. Wigmore was a great deal too well bred for that. Lady Lowry, on her side, had discovered that she had the power of being useful to her high-born friends ; and the discovery was at once appreciated at its full value by her practical mind. It might suit her to have the Wigmores on a visit to Lowry Place when she should be mistress of it :—it might suit her for a time at all events. But if they came there they should be yoked to her triumphal chariot in the sight of all men. She would not only patronize the

brother and sister-in-law of a real live peer of the realm, but she would be known to patronize them. Sarah had made rapid progress in the lore of fashionable society in the course of a few months. But then it must be owned that Nature had provided a very favourable soil for the seeds of this education.

Lady Lowry and her experiences with the spirits had become celebrated, and were discussed during that winter in many a country house full of aristocratic visitors. Men talked of the affair in the hunting-field; ladies gave each other new and confidential versions of it over afternoon cups of tea; and there was scarcely a servants' hall in the kingdom—of any pretensions to quality, that is to say—in which the most astounding particulars about the Lowry family and Dr. Flagge did not circulate freely. Much agreeably shuddering excitement was developed among the maids. They declined to go about old-fashioned staircases and corridors alone after dark; and listened greedily to vivid particulars of phantom hands, and spectral faces, and hollow voices, which were said to have manifested themselves through the mediumship of Dr. Flagge. These menial persons were not sufficiently cultivated to content themselves with

ghosts who merely tapped on tables, or tipped them up, or wrote not very startling messages through the fingers of the medium ; but preferred to have their supernatural excitements, like their food and drink, of a strong, not to say coarse, flavour. But whether "upstairs, or downstairs, or in my lady's chamber," the Lowrys and Dr. Flagge the medium were discussed with immense relish. Mrs. Wigmore achieved a considerable reputation by the letters which she wrote to one "nobleman's" or "gentleman's seat" after another upon the subject. She even received an invitation to spend one week with her aunt, the deaf old Marchioness Dowager of Dulldrum (who generally snubbed and scolded her, and turned the deafest of her two ears to any hint of inviting the Percy Wigmores to Dulldrum), in order that she might tell the Marchioness *viva voce* all about "those people who forged the will and were found out by the spirits."

Mrs. Wigmore bitterly regretted that the affair had not happened a little earlier,—before the end of London season, in fact ; as in that case it would have enabled her to pass the autumn in making a round of visits to "nice" people, going from house to house in a sort of triumphal progress, and working her dear

friend Lady Lowry as an exceptionally rich and almost unexplored mine of gossip. However, she promised herself a great accession of importance in the coming season from her acquaintance with the Lowrys. She had really been a prominent figure throughout the case; had absolutely been the first person to introduce Flagge to Sir Cosmo's house; had been present at the first *séance* he gave there; and could give authentic and minute particulars at first hand about all the parties concerned. It had really been a splendid opportunity, and Mrs. Wigmore was resolved to make the most of it.

Meanwhile the family mansion in Green Street was not an altogether pleasant abode. Miss Lowry was gone away. Enone was gone away. Lady Lowry was not as strong as usual in health, and much stronger than usual in obstinacy and self-assertion. Sir Cosmo, with a slow fever of avarice always on him, and with the undeveloped symptoms of another mental malady latent in him,—a malady which was more complicated, which combated the other, and which was compounded of anxiety, despondence, and something very like remorse,—was unbearably irritable, and bitter of tongue. Poor Rosamond regretted

the humble contentment of Nelson Place a hundred times a day; for the delight of rustling a long dress over the drawing-room carpet (although undoubtedly seductive) did not compensate to warm-hearted Rosy for the absence of affection and communion of minds.

As Papa Czernovic had candidly declared to her ladyship, Green Street was dull,—deadly dull. And even the visits of Percival Wigmore became pleasant to Rosamond as bringing suggestions and reminiscences of an outside world where there were people who read, and chatted, and ran, and laughed, and loved each other. None of these things took place in Sir Cosmo's house; unless some of them happened in the servants' hall.

The experience of life comes to many of us with an impression similar to that which we feel on seeing with our bodily eyes scenes and places made familiar to our fancy by pictures and descriptions. Certain general truths are the common heritage of all educated persons, as certain famous spots are made known to all the world by pen and pencil. But when we see them for ourselves, they are at once like and unlike to the image formed beforehand in the mind. Thus, although Rosamond had accepted mechanically various philosophic

propositions as to the powerlessness of wealth to give contentment, and so forth; yet she undoubtedly felt a good deal of *naïve* surprise at discovering for herself *how* weary, depressed, and dull it was possible to be in a very long silk gown with a great many flounces: and that one might pass hours in alternating listlessness and restlessness, surrounded by the most expensive upholstery, and ministered to by attendants accustomed to the best families.

There were long consultations with Dr. Flagge from which Rosamond was excluded, and long colloquies in the library between Sir Cosmo and his wife, which were also kept secret from her. An air of secrecy pervaded the comings and goings of several persons whom my lady admitted to her presence. My lady kept her room a good deal, and passed most of her time on a sofa, and the house was hushed until the very air seemed stagnant. Lady Lowry did not treat her step-daughter unkindly. She grudged nothing for her material comfort ;—often, indeed, insisting on more liberality in the matter of her dress, and so forth, than Sir Cosmo was willing to show, and desiring that Lobley himself should accompany the carriage whenever Miss Rosa-

mond Lowry drove out alone with the maid. But there was one circumstance which made it impossible for Rosamond to be on pleasant terms with her step-mother ;—the circumstance, in a word, that Lady Lowry was herself, and not somebody else !

The days dragged their slow length along wearily. Rosamond's sole amusement consisted in being taken out to drive occasionally by Mrs. Wigmore, at the instance chiefly of the good-natured Percival. The Honourable Alexandrina blinked her white eyelashes at Rosamond, and talked to her with considerable condescension at first. But she soon found that Rosamond was not an agreeable companion. The girl was docile and well-behaved indeed ; silent too, and a good listener. But somehow or other Mrs. Wigmore was conscious that she was not making a brilliant impression on her young friend. And then Rosy was not amenable to that process in conversational mechanics, vulgarly termed pumping, and in which Mrs. Wigmore was an adept. And she had an unpleasant and utterly unworldly way of replying straightforwardly to any polite hints of a tortuous nature, that she would rather not tell so and so ; and that she thought Papa, or Lady

Lowry, or Aunt Mary, or OEnone,—as the case might be,—would not like her to talk about their private affairs.

“Tut, tut, my dear,” said Mrs. Wigmore to her one day, being much discomposed by some plain rebuff of this sort, “you mustn’t talk to me in that way! It’s bad manners.”

“I’m very sorry,” answered Rosamond flushing. “I did not mean to be ill-mannered.”

“I hope not. But as to not liking to talk about private affairs—that sort of thing may be all very well with—with your inferiors and juniors; but my case is very different.”

“I know you are a great deal older than I am, of course,” said Rosamond.

Mrs. Wigmore looked out mistrustfully from under her white eyelashes, but the simple honesty of Rosy’s face could not be mistaken.

“Certainly I am older than you. Every one who is out of their teens is older than you. You are a mere chit, my dear. And—to return to what I was saying, you have not tact enough, it seems, to make distinctions. You ought to try to acquire a little more *savoir faire*. Now Lady Lowry is a very intimate friend of mine, and has perfect confidence in me;—perfect.”

"Well, then," said Rosy,—not without a touch of malice, for she did not like being called a "chit:" a girl of fifteen and three-quarters, and in long dresses too!—"well, then, if she is so perfectly confidential with you, she will tell you what you want to know if you ask her yourself, Mrs. Wigmore."

Upon which the Honourable Alexandrina looked out of the carriage window for a quarter of an hour in high dudgeon. She told her husband afterwards that she thought she should have to drop the Lowrys altogether: for, what with the growing presumption of that vulgar little woman, and the stolid stupidity of that lout of a girl,—who positively was not possessed of average powers of brain in Mrs. Wigmore's opinion, and whose bringing up amongst all sorts of savage tribes inhabiting the unexplored and central regions of Bloomsbury had made her perfectly *impossible*,—the whole thing had become a bore and a strain on Mrs. Wigmore's nervous system.

All this, however, was of course only Mrs. Wigmore's way of blowing off (if the phrase may pass) the ill-temper into which Rosy's awkwardness had put her. And Percy quite

understood it in that sense. He protested, indeed, with some spirit against the injustice of Alexandrina's next proceeding, which was to tax him with being wholly and solely responsible for whatever annoyance she might suffer at the hands of the Lowrys; and he declined to exhibit any concern whatever as to the strained condition of Mrs. Wigmore's nervous system. And indeed it was astonishing what an amount of strain Mrs. Wigmore's nervous system had been known to stand when there had been either pleasure or profit to be got by standing it.

However this might be, Mrs. Wigmore continued to visit Lady Lowry. But she relinquished her drives with Rosamond; and that young lady was thenceforward only allowed to look at the world from the windows of the house in Green Street, or from behind the railings of a certain spot in the Park where she paced up and down daily for an hour in the congenial company of Lady Lowry's maid, Miss Moore.

But one day she received a sudden and delightful shock of surprise from the following announcement made to her by Lady Lowry: " You will be ready to travel next week, Rosamond. I have given Moore orders what

things to pack for you. We are going to Elcaster."

"Oh!"—a long-breathed, joyful exclamation. "To Aunt Mary?"

"Well,—we shall see. We are not going to stay actually in Lowry Place just at first. But I think,—and your papa thinks,—that it is desirable for us to be on the spot."

CHAPTER III.

A VERY brief consideration of all the circumstances sufficed to convince Dr. Flagge that there was no reason on earth why OEnone should possess a monopoly in dreams. Flagge said to himself that he could dream too. He would not betray "Nony's" confidence, but—he would dream a dream. Indeed, it demanded no ingenuity and little cunning to invent such a dream as OEnone's: for the walnut desk had figured largely in all Lady Lowry's talks and conjectures on the subject of her father-in-law's will. That repository was quite sure to be searched whenever the missing will should be sought for. He could not help perceiving all this, and yet—explain it who can—it is certain that Dr. Obadiah Flagge the medium clung with superstitious credulity to OEnone's dream, and more than half believed it to be a supernatural revelation. But meanwhile it was necessary to prosecute

his trade with vigour; and Dr. Flagge no more permitted his vague faith in the supernatural visitant of Oenone's visions to interfere with the practical conduct of life, than a great many other much more respectable persons allow their creed to override their greed.

He was not apt to waver, or deliberate irresolutely, and a course of action having presented itself to his mind, he proceeded to carry it out without delay.

"Look you here, fair lady," said he to Sarah, "the developments are assooming a character of lofty elevation, and sensational interest, such as I do not remember of ever having experienced before."

He was sitting in Lady Lowry's boudoir. There was a huge fire, and my lady was reclining on a sofa with a fur rug over her. The atmosphere of the room was dim, fragrant, warm, and altogether conducive to drowsiness. And in fact my lady had been taking a nap after luncheon. No ordinary visitor would have been admitted to disturb her; but Dr. Flagge was privileged, and enjoyed the *entrée*.

"Is there anything new?" demanded my lady, raising her head a little higher by means of a cushion.

"Why, yes; there's a good deal that's new.

My organism has been, as it were, taken possession of by a certain spirit, in a way which is unparalleled in the whole of my psychical experience. The influence is uncommon powerful ;—most uncommon powerful."

"But does it say anything positive ? Does it give you anything to *take hold of*? Sir Cosmo says he's quite tired of talk, and should like to see some facts. And I must say I consider Sir Cosmo to be quite right there."

Flagge looked at her with a cool, keen, slightly contemptuous glance ; nor did he take pains to disguise the slight contempt that was in it. He flattered himself that he understood the fair Sarah Lowry very thoroughly.

"Well, I guess some folks don't know a fact when they see it," said he. "A stiffer, tougher bit o' fact than Quickit's witness to the will, I don't know as I ever came across. But *I* understand all about it, Lady Lowry. I ain't going to say that you are unreasonable. You're a lady of remarkable strength of mind and force of character. There are transcendental elements, too, that surround the rugged force of practical abilities with a gem-like halo in *your* case, ma'am. But there are other naturs not so fort'nately amalgamated up :—naturs full of material alloy, to which the

impalpable influences of an unseen world appeal in vain. So Sir Cosmo wants facts—does he? Why, there's facts as cannot be weighed and measured in material balances, lady, but which nevertheless are full of fateful force. You can't weigh out evidence by the pound; but it's heavy enough sometimes to turn almost any scale. You apprehend this, lady?"

"Of course I do," returned Sarah, with a little extra emphasis, resulting from some secret doubts in her own mind as to whether she did apprehend it or not.

"Well, I tell you that when I am asked for facts, and talked to 'bout facts, and taunted with producing no facts, I feel like giving up the whole thing in disgust."

"Oh, don't talk like that, Dr. Flagge."

"Well, lady, it revolts the feelings to be eternally dunne'd at for facts. It turns the sympathetic currents of your natur back upon yourself, and leads to the inquiry why in thunder you should loaf around one 'special fam'ly, and devote the highest psychological developments of an exceptionally gifted organism to their all-fired kettle of fish without a corresponding compensation; yes ma'am."

"Oh, well," returned my lady stolidly, as

being somewhat brought to bay, "but you have been paid, Dr. Flagge. You know you have."

"Why, I have received a sum stipulated beforehand, in return for a very valuable and extraordinary piece of information. How far my time has been remunerated, reckoning it a guinea an hour, which I can procure without difficulty from the enlightened and aristocratic members of fashionable society, and be cracked up with the most exalted appreciation over and above, is a question which I will not require you to answer—to me. Put it to yourself, lady, and judge of the purity of my motives for pursuing these inquiries."

"I suppose it answered your purpose in some way or other, or else you wouldn't have bothered yourself."

"That's what Sir Cosmo says, is it?"

My lady looked up surprised.

"Oh, I recognize his note well enough. Sir Cosmo is a gentleman of refined education, but he's no more transcendental than those chimney-pots. You are organized different. And I'll tell you what, lady; if it wasn't for having found in you sympathies of a superior and immaterial kind, the spirits would no more have manifested themselves in

this house than you'd go and visit around in St. Giles's."

"Well, I have told Sir Cosmo that he may thank me if Sir Rupert has revealed as much as he has."

"Yes, lady; that is a sunlight truth. The spirits have been treated by other members of this family in a manner calculated to raise the dander of a sensitive organization."

"I've said so, to Sir Cosmo, over and over again."

"And where the moral atmosphere is not congenial, the spirits will not produce developments of any value; they'll see you—further first."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry if the spirits have had their feelings hurt, but it has not been my doing. And I think they ought to have sense enough to know the difference. I can't be responsible for everybody, though as the mistress of the house I seem to be expected to be. But I am fully acquainted with the duties of my position, and if the spirits will muddle everybody up together I cannot help it. I have the comfort of knowing that I am not in any way to blame," said my lady, with a slow and steady outpouring of words. Whatever might be my lady's veneration for

and sympathy with the spirits, she reserved the strongest manifestations of those qualities in this, as in every other case, for herself.

Flagge proceeded to justify what he called the purity of his motives, on the grounds that although he had got something by interpreting the utterances of Sir Rupert Lowry, utterances of a nature highly benevolent towards my lady, and likely to be substantially beneficial to Sir Cosmo, yet he might meanwhile have been getting more by interpreting the utterances of other and more frivolous spirits, who had no scope in view save the amusement or bewilderment of various fine ladies and gentlemen. "And if taking one dollar where you might be getting two ain't purity, I should like to know what is," said Dr. Flagge.

He then inquired whether any steps had been taken in earnest to seek for the will, and was told that Miss Lowry had expressed her anxiety to have a thorough search made in Lowry Place. Flagge shook his head sceptically. He had not much belief, he said, in the anxiety of any heir to find a document which might disinherit him. And then—Miss Lowry was a particularly earthly and material-minded person, and the spirits on the whole had but a poor opinion of her.

Now Lady Lowry's faith in the spirits was established on the broad and rational basis of their expressed high estimate of herself; and scarcely anything could have enhanced that faith so much as their expressing a low estimate of Mary.

"Well," said she, "I should wish to be guided by Sir Rupert's advice. But what can we do? I believe it's against the law for us to search the premises ourselves without Mary's leave. And a very shameful law it seems to me!"

"Couldn't you be present, anyhow?"

"Well,—I—you see Mary has not asked us. Sir Cosmo did say something about running down to Clevenal in the spring weather."

"In the spring? Why, there's time enough between now and what you could call spring weather in this climate for—for anything to happen to the will, supposing it's in that house."

My lady turned pale. "La!" she exclaimed faintly; "why—what do you mean?"

"Well, the house might be burned down and the will with it," returned Flagge, drily. "I tell you I have had revelations of a startling character."

"La!" ejaculated my lady again, and her eyes grew rounder and rounder.

"Yes; but I ain't a-going to impart them gratis, Lady Lowry. If Sir Cosmo and I can make a deal,—good. If not, I've made up my mind to go abroad."

"Go abroad?"

"Yes; the season here don't begin till May or April. Everything's very flat and dull now. The aristocratic classes with whom I chiefly sympathize—not from any servile prejudices, for I am a Republican who has snuffed the free air of the Western prairies, and scorn the feudal trammels of an effete civilization,—but because I find their minds refined up to the point of appreciating the phenomena of spiritism, and paying for 'em,—well, there's scarce any of 'em in London. So I've made up my mind to go across to Paris. There's a field there. I can have letters to the fashionable world there from the Honourable Lady Wigmore and from others. I may go on to Italy afterwards. Florence or Nice or Rome or Naples might suit me. There's a good deal of gaiety amongst the English and Americans in those southern cities, and I've observed, as a general rule, that wherever people have nothing to do but amuse them-

selves, the spirits are popular. It's a beautiful law of nature when you come to think of it. Directly the sordid business of life recedes into the background, the soul kind of hankers after spiritual pabulum. And I can give it 'em."

Sarah was aghast at all this. The idea of Flagge's leaving London and going away out of her reach had not occurred to her as probable. And he spoke now in an assured, easy, cool manner, neither too emphatic nor too careless, which persuaded her that he meant what he said.

"Oh, but it wouldn't suit me at all for you to go away before this business is settled!" she cried, with a blunt directness caused by surprise.

Flagge shrugged his shoulders.

"At all events not before you've told what these 'startling revelations' are," pursued Sarah.

"Well, Sir Cosmo Lowry has got a certain amount of information already; and he's got it dirt cheap, too. P'raps that may be enough for him. If it turns out so, all the better."

"No, but I want to have you here to help me to keep Sir Cosmo up to the mark," persisted my lady. "Because I know how

it will be if the thing's let to dawdle on, and he isn't spurred up; it'll just die off altogether. There will be some sort of a search made in Lowry Place, and nothing will be found, and then Sir Cosmo will turn round on me and say I've been humbugged, and the spirits are bosh, and then nothing will induce him to take any more trouble about it, and there'll be an end!"

"Well, I guess that's so. You've about stated the case, lady. The perceptive faculties of the feminine intellect are awful quick, and desperate 'cute," returned Flagge quietly.

"And so we're to sit down tamely, me and mine, cheated out of our property, and Sir Rupert, poor dear old gentleman, not able to rest in his grave! It's very easy to talk so coolly about it, Dr. Flagge, but I should consider it downright wicked and irreligious to give everything up in that milk-and-water manner, and so I tell you."

My lady in her energy had sat upright on the sofa, and, what with the heat of the evening, the heaviness of the fur rug, and moral indignation, her cheeks were burning red, and her eyes glittered.

"Well, you'll see what'll come of the search in Miss Lowry's house. It *may* be satisfactory, you know."

"Oh no, it won't! You said yourself that—that anything might happen to the will when there's none of us there to overlook things. I'm sure you think there'll be foul play."

"Stop, lady! I wouldn't have the unpremeditated outpouring of a fervid temperament betray you into saying anything that might lead to an action for damages. 'Foul play' is one of those expressions which the cold administrators of terrestrial laws are apt to object to pretty strong:—it's libellous, lady, that's a fact."

"Why, *you* said so!" replied my lady a little glumly.

"I'm prepared to take my oath I didn't—so there would be a disagreeable discrepancy in our evidence, if it came to that."

"Upon my word, Dr. Flagge——"

"It's best to be plain and clear on some points. The element of vagueness is delightful, but it may be carried too far; especially whilst we're living under the conditions of this earthly sphere. Look here, Lady Lowry, you can just set before Sir Cosmo Lowry, Baronet, the following facts:—I've got fresh information; I'm prepared to impart it on moderate terms. I can't afford to waste my time in London any longer; if he offers a suitable

remuneration to me for assisting to ferret out the missing will, by spiritual revelations, and material investigations, I'm willing to pursue the inquiry. I've helped him to something tangible before, and may again. As to the respect due to the wishes of his late father, and the duty of carrying out his real testamentary arrangements, you'll say as much or as little of that as you think fit. It don't matter a red cent to me what Sir Cosmo's individual opinion of me may be. There ain't any magnetic sympathies between our organizations, and when I have to deal with the unspiritually minded, I make it a rule to do so on the basis of dollars, or whatever may be the currency of the country in which I am located for the time being. I shall remain in London till the end of the current week. After Sunday next it will be too late to negotiate."

"Sunday next? Dear me, that's very soon!"

"Well, I guess it ain't very long first; no. But I am rapid in my resolutions and in my actions. I have careered along the interminable plains of the Far West mounted upon the fleetest steeds of the warlike Appanawchees, and something of their fierce and

lightning swiftness has entered into my blood, lady," said Dr. Flagge in the very slowest and most melancholy of drawls, and with a face and attitude expressive of hopeless languor. "And see here, I want you to lend me your carriage every morning for the next few days."

Lady Lowry stared in genuine amazement.

"Lend you my carriage!" she cried. "Oh dear, I hardly think I could do that!"

"Well, I reckon you could;—yes."

"But—what to do?—where to go?"

"Well, to come to my house every morning, say at eleven o'clock, and drive for one hour in the Regent's Park."

"Goodness! I never heard such a strange request!"

"I am emancipated from the trammels of a hollow conventionality, lady; and when I want a thing I go right ahead to get it."

"And should you drive about the Regent's Park by yourself every morning?" asked Lady Lowry, after a minute or so of perplexed meditation.

"Tain't for myself at all. It's for Nony."

"Miss Balasso!" almost shrieked Lady Lowry. "Then I positively refuse. And I wonder how you can think of asking me such a thing. Little ungrateful hussy!" She left

my house in the most abominable way, and brought a dreadful old foreign man here to insult me before the servants. You can ask Lobley what he was. Why, he actually made bows to my footman and housemaid before my face ! Low bows ! ”

It was a queer and characteristic trait of the accomplished Mrs. Bolitho’s training, that after stating old Czernovic to have insulted herself, Sarah considered that a further climax of horror could be reached by declaring he had been civil to her servants.

“ Possible ? Why, on’y think ! Well, I can conceive of it’s having riled a lady accustomed to the refined and polished intercommunications of the wealthy and the great. But respecting the carriage, lady, I want to have you do this thing a little for me, and a good deal for yourself.”

“ I feel quite certain that it won’t do me the least good to lend Miss Balasso my carriage,” answered Lady Lowry emphatically.

“ Why, it might now. Nony’s out of health a good deal,—so much as to have lost in part her mediumistic power. If she gets real sick it’ll go altogether, and—I don’t mind telling you that it’s from her I have derived the most important communications from Sir Rupert.”

"What, lately?"

"Well, within a comparatively recent period. She'll get back the power entirely if she can have air and gentle exercise without fatigue. Sir Rupert has a very remarkable sympathy with Nony."

"It seems to me that you have a very remarkable sympathy with her, Dr. Flagge," returned my lady, staring at him. "And it's more than I have, I can tell you."

"Well, see here, I can't undertake to carry this investigation through without the assistance of a first-rate sensitive. You're a lady of a powerful grasp of mind, and you ain't a-going to allow your personal feelings to interfere with your interests. If sending your carriage to take a young girl a drive in an unfrequented locality, at an unfashionable hour, will assist your views and forward the carrying out of a sacred dooty, I guess you're going to send that carriage."

"Dr. Flagge, I *can't* do it;—I really can't! Just consider my servants. I put it to you—for although you do not belong to my set, you have some experience of society,—I simply put it to you, what *do* you suppose Lobley would think?"

A very vigorous and comprehensive devo-

tion of Lobley and all his compeers to the infernal deities, expressed in the raciest idiom of New England, was with difficulty suppressed by Dr. Flagge. He stood silent for a few minutes, looking at Lady Lowry, mentally opposing her dull cunning with his keen cunning, her thick-blooded obstinacy with his nervous eagerness. Finally, he said, "You rent your carriage and horses, don't you?"

"What?"

"You hire 'em,—they ain't your property?"

"Sir Cosmo has not purchased an equipage for me yet. Just for the present, we thought——"

"Now then, see here. You write a line to the stableman you deal with, and tell him to send round a nice trap with one horse to be at my door at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. Your servants don't need to come; nor know anything of the matter. I require Nony's assistance, and if Nony's to give it she's got to get stronger. And if you like to put it so, I'll accept the use of your carriage as part payment for myself; but it's got to be sent, and there's no two ways about it."

And so the matter was agreed upon; my lady, however, making inviolable secrecy a

sine quâ non for her fulfilment of the bargain. For, as she said, it wasn't so much that she minded making this concession to Miss Balasso, after Miss Balasso's conduct to her, but it was the look of the thing which would be so bad if it were known.

And when Flagge was gone, she had a rather stormy interview with her husband, which resulted in that determination to be "on the spot" which she communicated to Rosamond, recorded in the last chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

IT must not be supposed that Clevenal was so "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," as not to have enjoyed its share of the scandal about Sir Rupert's will. The Sydenham Spencers knew all about it; Mrs. Scarsdale, the naval officer's widow, talked it over with the vicar's wife; and it was a standing and substantial dish of gossip at every tea-table in Clevenal and Elcaster. Mr. and Mrs. Flint had rather a hard time of it in those days.

"I really know nothing of the matter," Mrs. Flint would say majestically. "What notions the present Lady Lowry may have taken into her head I cannot tell. Nor does it appear to me to be of much consequence."

Upon which some curious and disappointed female friend would exclaim, "Oh, but you have been amongst them all up in London, Mrs. Flint! You surely must know whether it's true that Lady Lowry has taken to

spiritualism, and had all sorts of things revealed to her by a medium ; and whether she attacked Miss Lowry before a whole roomful of people, and threatened to go to law with her ; and whether Sir Cosmo hunted out a witness—brought him back from Australia or America, some say—to swear that Sir Rupert made a will just before he died, leaving Lowry Place and all the settled property to his son ! ”

All of which was unspeakably annoying to Mrs. Flint. Her husband was not assailed so directly ; or, if he were, he could intrench himself behind the professional etiquette which forbids a lawyer to chatter about the affairs of his clients. But still Mr. Samuel Flint by no means escaped the hearing of much gossip that vexed and troubled him.

“It disgusts me with human nature, Bertha,” said Mr. Flint to his wife, “to see the eagerness with which all this miserable business of the Lowrys is seized upon and discussed by people.”

“The world will talk, Samuel. And the Lowrys hold, and have held for generations, a position which makes them persons of mark in the county. If Mr. Sydenham Spencer died, and there was any dispute about his will,

I don't know that it would become matter for public comment."

"The worst of it is, that what gives zest to the scandal is the suspicion——"

"Suspicion, Samuel!"

"Yes; the suspicion of—of some unfair dealing—of foul play, in short," replied Mr. Flint, unconsciously echoing my lady's phrase. "It makes me sick to see the eagerness with which people fasten on it, and fatten on it, like crows on carrion. Would it be so if news came that Sir Cosmo had begun to treat his sister with fraternal confidence and affection? Or that Mary was going to marry a Duke?"

"I'm sure they'd talk enough about that, Samuel."

"Perhaps; but they wouldn't enjoy it so much! Ugh! Envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness!"

"Samuel—what *could* be expected when Sir Cosmo married that woman?"

If the plague had broken out in Clevenal village, or a thunderbolt destroyed the church, I am afraid that Mrs. Flint would have attributed the disaster to that terrible *mésalliance* of Sir Cosmo Lowry.

To Mary herself there came but few and faint glimpses of the excitement which her

family affairs were causing in the neighbourhood. She lived now in the old house much as she had lived in it in her father's time. Of course there was a great difference between the position of a dutiful daughter, living under the authority of a tyrannous old man, and that of the sole mistress of Lowry Place, of the grounds which surrounded it, and the dependents who lived in it. But it was a difference which made itself felt very quietly, and was hardly visible to a stranger's eye. Few strangers came to behold the difference—few persons outside of Miss Lowry's household, that is to say; for of real strangers, in the full sense of the word, very few ever came to Clevenal, and none to Lowry Place. The "county families" called on her, driving over in state, and paying short and formal visits. There was nothing new in this. The long seclusion in which Mary had lived during the latter part of her father's life had prevented her from being on intimate terms with any of her neighbours. But she was Miss Lowry of Lowry, and hitherto had done nothing to forfeit the respect due to that position.

She had done nothing to forfeit it, so far as the county families knew. To be sure, there were ugly rumours afloat. People

talked of some trickery concerning a will. Some said that Sir Rupert had lost his strength of mind towards the last, and had had undue pressure put upon him by his daughter as to the disposition of his property. It is true that he might have left her everything he had in the world,—except the bit of entailed land, which was worth nothing,—because Mary Hovenden's marriage settlement had left a discretionary power in the hands of the surviving parent as to which of her children should inherit the property, and in what proportions. But then that would have been going too far. And, after all, though Sir Rupert might be childish to a certain degree, yet there had probably been a point at which he would have resisted, had he been urged too far. It was a queer business altogether. But the Lowrys were a queer family, and always had been. However, as they had been settled at Clevenal since before the Conquest, it behoved people to treat Miss Lowry with civility:—at all events for the present. And as to Lady Lowry, if she should come to live among them, it would then be time enough to decide how to treat her. And of course if she came one must call on her, if it were only to ascertain what she was like;—mustn't one?

Mr. Flint had to fight a great many battles, and to exercise a great deal of self-restraint and discretion in the midst of the various currents of opinion. He was a popular man in his way, and personally acquainted with half the county ; and, moreover, he was known not only as the lawyer, but as the friend, of the late baronet and his daughter. He was loyal and staunch in his championship of Mary ; but he felt that a too loud and eager championship of her would be injudicious. There are some accusations which it is wise to ignore, unless they are made with unmistakable openness. It would have been very dreadful to Mr. Flint to have to declare that Mary Lowry was a well-principled, honest woman, incapable of a lie or a theft ! Would your chosen friend deem you very loyal to his honour and reputation if you vaunted him behind his back as one who might certainly be relied on never to commit a felony ? And the place which Mary Lowry held in old Samuel Flint's esteem and affection was such as to make it painful to him—and very acutely painful—to have to admit that a defence of her against vague calumny might possibly become necessary. He had held her up as a paragon among women :

pre-eminent in beauty, and goodness, and sense. There had been perhaps a little jealousy in the breasts of some of their Elcaster cronies at the intimacy of Mr. and Mrs. Flint in Lowry Place. For although there was scarcely a man or woman in the little town who would not have found it very disagreeable to sit at dinner there whilst Sir Rupert lived, yet there were almost equally few who would not have found it very agreeable to say they had done so. The Lowrys of Lowry were big people in their own corner of the earth.

One ray of comfort came to Mrs. Flint in the midst of her troubles about Mary, from the fact that the old Countess of Elcaster and my lord her son were spending the winter at Elcaster House, and that the Countess had struck up something like an intimacy with Miss Lowry. The Earl of Elcaster was a rather dull man of five and forty, who had devoted the energies of his character from an early age to those pursuits which are compendiously included under the name of "the Turf." It was not very often that he honoured Elcaster House with a long visit. But this year he had been ill; and during the weakness of a slow convalescence

had yielded to his mother's wish that she should carry him down to Clevenal, there to live quietly and breathe the country air, until such time as he should feel strong enough to travel to the south of Italy. People said that the Earl's illness was due to mental rather than physical causes. Some declared that he had not been ill at all; merely cast down by heavy losses on the Turf during the late autumn meetings. He had truly lost a good deal of money:—a good deal of money even for an Earl of Elcaster. But his losses had not been so fatal as to break him down. A sharp attack of rheumatic fever had in truth more to do with prostrating his lordship's strength than the tremendous *fiasco* of that celebrated daughter of Atalanta by Æolus, on whose fleetness he had staked—and lost—a large sum of money. When Miss Lowry returned to her home from London, there were the mother and son living in her immediate neighbourhood, and the old Countess, as has been said, struck up something like an intimacy with her.

Lady Elcaster was a thin, sharp-tongued old lady, who had been a great beauty in her youth, and of the world worldly. She was of ancient lineage but poor; and when she

condescended to accept several hundred thousand pounds, clogged with a plébeian husband (he was not Earl of Elcaster in those days, and his father was a brewer), she set about making amends to her private feelings for the sacrifice, by consistent and haughty insolence to every one—her husband included—whose pedigree was not as good as her own. Her only son Basil inherited rather his father's temperament than hers, much to her ladyship's chagrin. He displayed the roughest indifference to the claims of rank and fashionable society; and whenever he particularly desired to punish his mother for some sarcastic speech, would discourse by the hour about his grandfather the brewer, and relate a favourite anecdote of how he had discovered a second cousin of his own in the village shopkeeper who supplied his trainer with soap and candles. Nevertheless, it may be believed that my Lord Elcaster had quite as high an estimate of his claims on the consideration of the world as his lady mother had of hers.

“I’m sorry we have not been better acquainted all these years, Miss Lowry,” said the Countess on the occasion of her first visit to Lowry Place. “But I have not been a

great deal at Clevenal ; and then—to tell the truth—Sir Rupert always snubbed us a little !”

“ My father saw very few people ; and no strangers, Lady Elcaster. He was disinclined for society in his latter years.”

“ Yes, yes ; no doubt. I understand. Well—we all have our troubles. But I hope that you and I may be good friends. It will be charitable of you to come and see an old woman.”

Mary did not, perhaps, feel much inclined to let her charity flow out in the direction of Elcaster House. But the Countess had taken a fancy to Miss Lowry ; and the Countess, when she took a fancy into her head, was not apt to be easily turned aside from gratifying it.

“ I don’t know when I’ve seen anything so thorough-bred, Basil,” said the old lady to her son. “ She’s perfectly delicious, with that stately turn of the head, and that apparent unconsciousness of self in all her movements which is *the* most difficult thing in the world to acquire—especially for a beauty.”

“ We don’t want her here,” growled Basil, whose taste in women lay by no means in

the direction of the “stately” and “thoroughbred” sort.

“I want her. And I mean to have her. I cannot stand these Clevenal creatures, my dear. Miss Lowry is at least delightful to look upon. Do you know that I had a severe bilious attack after the visit of that Mrs. Spencer Sydenham, or Sydenham Spencer, or whatever the woman’s name is? I attribute it entirely to her green and yellow gown.”

Lady Elcaster knew Mr. Flint very well. He had been employed on various business connected with that part of her son’s property which lay in the neighbourhood of Clevenal. And the next time she saw Mr. Flint, she talked to him about Mary Lowry.

“And what is she going to do? She can’t live there all alone. It would be preposterous. They tell me she’s thirty. But that’s nothing. She’s a great deal younger than many girls I know, of three and twenty, who have hacked themselves out, season after season. And as to beauty—I’m sure in the days of chivalry Lowry Place would have been besieged by an army of knights, eager to carry off such a princess!”

“The princess will take care to have a say

of her own in that matter of the carrying off, Lady Elcaster."

"Is there any one? Any favourite knight in the field, eh?"

"Not that I know of. Indeed, so far as I am aware there are no besieging knights at all. I only meant that Miss Mary will be likely to have a strong opinion of her own, in that as in most other matters. She is the most admirable lady in the world—goodness itself! And I've known her from a child. But she has her share of the Lowry strain in her; and the Lowrys have never been very malleable in their natures."

"Humph! The present man seems weak enough! To think of his making two such marriages! And they say this dairymaid whom he has taken for his second wife has him completely under her thumb. Not that I know anything about it."

"Sir Cosmo is very different from his sister," returned Mr. Flint gravely.

"I should think so. I wonder she never married. Although, to be sure, her father almost kept her under lock and key, as if she had been a real princess in a fairy tale. He was a terrible tartar, that old Sir Rupert!"

"He was a very old friend of mine, Lady Elcaster."

"Oh, I don't mean to disparage him. People have to be tartars sometimes. And it was enough to sour his temper, the way that son of his behaved. The Lowrys have good blood in their veins."

"Some of the best blood in England, Lady Elcaster."

Something of this conversation was revealed to Mrs. Flint by her husband; and the good lady felt a gleam of comfort.

"You may depend on it, Samuel, that Lady Elcaster wants Mary for her daughter-in-law," said Mrs. Flint.

"I should be sorry to 'depend' on anything so unsubstantial as that notion, my dear."

"I feel a *conviction* that it is so, Samuel. And where could she do better for her son ? Lord Elcaster is an earl, and a wealthy earl, but I don't know that he could do better than marry Mary Lowry if he searched all England through from one end to the other."

"Do better? No; but I scarcely know where she could do worse!"

"I should prefer Sir Thomas on the whole, certainly," replied Mrs. Flint with an air of candour. Sir Thomas was the landed pro-

prietor whom Mrs. Flint had entered on the tablets of her mind as the second possible candidate for Miss Lowry's hand. And after that Mr. Flint said no more.

But Mrs. Flint in the pride of her heart, and smarting under the sting of several disagreeable speeches which had recently been made to her about "her dear friends the Lowrys," could not refrain from dropping a hint here and there to the effect that it would be Miss Lowry's own fault if she didn't wear a coronet before long. And thus there was added an additional tit-bit to the already unusually succulent dish of gossip prepared by kind Fortune for the delectation of Elcaster, Clevenal, and the adjacent parishes.

Meanwhile Mary was living in her old home with a heavy heart and a weary spirit. Life seemed very hopeless and sunless to her. And certainly the prospect of becoming Countess of Elcaster would not have availed to brighten it, had such an idea entered her head. It had not entered her head. Neither, it may be said, had it entered Lord Elcaster's head either. Thus, as it often happens, the two principal parties concerned in the matter were the only two persons in the whole countryside who were ignorant of the destiny arranged for them by

the public voice. As to the old Countess, she was not without a dim and floating idea on the subject. But she kept the idea to herself, feeling that any open interference on her part would be highly injudicious. It must not be supposed that Lady Elcaster had any defined plan of inducing her son to marry Miss Lowry. But the thought certainly had crossed her mind that the arrangement might be a good one. Basil was no longer young. It was time he should marry, and highly desirable that he should marry a "nice" person. Basil had displayed a taste for persons who were not "nice." That was an evil at which his mother was able to shrug her shoulders very philosophically ; but unfortunately he had once upon a time manifested symptoms of intending to make a person who was by no means "nice" the Countess of Elcaster. His mother had had a terrible fright on that occasion, which she had never forgotten. Now Providence seemed to have thrown this handsome, stately, well-born woman in Basil's way, and if Basil would but profit by the chance, his mother acknowledged to herself that she should be satisfied with such a daughter-in law as Mary Lowry. Twenty years ago she might have been more exigent in the matter of money ;

and, perhaps, of title. But Basil was forty-five, and then the old lady remembered their narrow escape from the person who was so far from "nice." That any opposition might come from Miss Lowry—that certainly had not entered Lady Elcaster's head.

CHAPTER V.

Yes; Enone was discovering day by day how difficult it is to be heroic. As she had said to Miss Lowry, doing things was so different from thinking beforehand that one would do them. "Things"—circumstances in general—would not present themselves after a fashion which admitted of heroic treatment! She had felt it to be rather heroic to cut herself off from all communication with the Lowrys, and still more with Major Maude. But the excitement and support of this feeling soon grew cold and dead under the conviction that her disappearance from their circle was looked on as a matter of no consequence. No one missed her, no one tempted the strength of her resolution by trying to coax her back among them. Since that little note from Rosamond she had heard no more from Green Street; and after that one visit of Vincent Maude—made, as she bitterly remembered, not for her

sake, but for Mary Lowry's—there had been no need of putting in force her stern resolve not to see him,—for he had not come again ! If only she could get that longed-for letter from her father ! The sickening, wearying hope deferred ate into her life like a file.

Perhaps—so dependent are we on those things which we call trifles—the one circumstance which refreshed her spirit with strength to live and hope on, and to keep her thoughts fixed, poor child, on the loftiness of her inheritance as a Greek, was Obadiah Flagge's daily gift of flowers. Without this delicate incense for her proud and sensitive self-love she might have sunk down hopeless and helpless altogether. Her countrymen of old believed that their deities were actually fed upon incense and the smoke of sacrifice, and that when once the altar fires were cold the god would die. Poor Oenone's divinity was not self-sustaining enough to live without some whiff of praise and love. The perfume of Dr. Flagge's Gardenia faintly nourished the day-dreams of her Greek superiority, and her Greek delight in beauty. But still she found it very difficult to be heroic.

Dr. Flagge told Papa Czernovic of the arrangement he had made about a carriage

for CEnone to drive in every morning. That is to say, he told him as much of the arrangement as seemed good to him; but he made it appear that the carriage was sent by Lady Lowry's spontaneous will. He imagined that CEnone would spurn the favour if she thought it came from him. Papa Czernovic probably guessed the truth. "*Nein!*" said he afterwards, to Bob Doery; "dat woman could not have dat thought nevermore! She is so a Philister what I have never knowed; and doll,—Ach Gott, how is she doll, dat woman!" But he accepted Dr. Flagge's statement without remark, and agreed with him that CEnone ought to avail herself of the opportunity of getting some fresh air without fatigue. But he disappointed Flagge's calculations by declaring himself certain that CEnone would never consent to use the carriage if she believed it to be supplied to her by Lady Lowry.

"Why in nature shouldn't she?" urged Flagge. "She's earned more'n that at Green Street at a fair market price. They got a deal out of Nony among them, one way and another. Why, she taught that apple-faced English girl to play music an hour every day." Dr. Flagge did not put forward her services as

a *sensitive*, according to his own phraseology; not being fond of touching on those topics with Papa Czernovic, who was apt to grow watchful, and to get a cool, fox-like glitter in his old grey eyes when they were mentioned to him in connection with OEnone. But in his own mind Flagge seriously considered that the price of a carriage for an hour every day during the rest of her life would not be an adequate payment from Lady Lowry to OEnone for services rendered.

"I dunno as I'm particularly fond of Lady Lowry myself," said he, argumentatively, "but I don't see as that's any reason for not getting all you can out of her. It's the principle *she* goes on, anyhow! And when people stroke me the wrong way, why, they've got to pay for it."

But Papa Czernovic persisted that this was a view of the matter which it was hopeless to present to OEnone. "She vill not ride in de coach of dat woman," said Papa Czernovic. "Nona hef de artist temperament. A fine, *fine* little sensitif fiddle. But if you play him bet, he vill squeak, ja!"

"Then what the devil *are* we to do?" asked Flagge, in a tone of disappointment that was almost pathetic. Pathetic, too, was

the appealing look he gave to old Czernovic as though begging for help; at least, it might be so to those who knew the self-reliant, unscrupulous adventurer in his everyday aspect, and who understood that his present phase of irresolution was due to—to love, in short, sheer love, such as school-girls learn from old-fashioned novels written in the days before mankind was supposed to have outgrown that romantic sentiment!

“Vell, my friend, dere is a vay——”

“Is there? Go right ahead!”

“You might say dat de Major” (Papa Czernovic pronounced the word *Mah-yor*) “our goot friend have provide de coach for Nona.”

“I’m damned if I do!” returned Flagge in a singularly quiet voice.

“Aha! So? Vell, but Nona would ride in de coach from de Mah-yor. He is a goot Mensch: *vortrefflich!*”

“Well, I’m damned if I say it, Papa Czernovic! That’s so!”

And this second time Flagge’s voice was almost flute-like in its softness.

Old Czernovic began to understand the position. “Tell Nona dat you hef de coach yourself, and offer her to ride in it,” said he.

"She'll refuse," said Flagge with a wistful look.

"Ve can dry," returned Papa Czernovic with his usual imperturbable good-humour.
"Vot it cost to dry?"

So they proceeded upstairs to make the proposition to Enone. Just as they reached the door, Flagge pulled his companion's sleeve and whispered, "See here, now, just put it as if it was your notion, won't you? Don't let her think I'm too anxious about it." And in reply Papa Czernovic put his finger to one side of his nose, shut his eyes tight, and smiled.

Enone proved to be less obdurate than had been expected. "I don't want to drive out," she said, languidly. "Why are you so bent on it?"

"Because dere is de chance of de coach for noting, Nona! Ven our goot friend Flagge tell me dat dat woman provide him a coach, I say vy not make Nona hef a ride?"

"I dunno what to do with the trap. Lady Lowry would send it. She ain't using it just now. And—you know what she is, Nony—it'd pretty well kill her to think the livery stableman should get any advantage by having a holiday. I was a-going to send it

off right away, but Papa Czernovic thought you and his wife might like a turn in the Regent's Park for an hour. Funny enough, you remember I was saying to you on'y the other day as I thought a drive would be good for you, Nony."

All this elaborate attempt to deceive Cenone as to the real state of the case was superfluous. She did not even examine Flagge's words suspiciously. What did it matter? She was going away; and she would not fight against the wishes of the people around her during these last weeks and days. Accordingly the next morning she and Mamma Czernovic entered the brougham sent by Lady Lowry, and were driven round the Regent's Park. Madame Czernovic had consented to the arrangement, as she would have consented to any arrangement proposed by her husband and Nona; but it must be owned that she found it a dull business, and that she presented a rather forlorn spectacle staring out of her outlandish fur wraps, with her soft blue eyes full of wonder and resignation. Cenone indulged in a reverie. Now that it was quite certain that she had made that plunge into social depths far removed from the sphere where Vincent Maude lived,—now that she

looked forward to leaving England for ever, she might surely allow herself the consolation of thinking of him ! She might be allowed to remember, at least, without wronging any one. But at seventeen years of age the imagination is more apt to busy itself with the future than with the past. And C^Enونe transferred the figure of her hero into all sorts of wild and romantic scenes far away from the hard poverty and prose of her London life. She knew that these were day-dreams of the most unsubstantial sort. But they were sweet, and she could not turn away from their sweetness. If she should meet him some day in her own glorious Greece ! He had spoken of his desire to travel in that classic land. If he should see her there, amidst all the beauty and the grandeur and the pathos of Grecian ruins and Grecian landscape—and if she should present him to her father as one who had been her friend in the forlornness of her wandering childhood—and if her father, welcoming him with the stately grace of his country, should win his respect and admiration, and he should see her no longer surrounded by common and coarse associations, but in her rightful place as the daughter of a lofty race, might it not be——?

These day-dreams had perhaps no more definite outlines than have the dazzling sunset visions of the cloudy west in autumn ; but they were sweet, and Oenone fed her imagination with them, whilst her frail little body was being carried round and round the Regent's Park on a nipping January morning.

"Nona," said Papa Czernovic, receiving her at the door of Mr. Quickit's house on her return, "here is some one for to see you!"

"To see me?" The foolish young heart began to beat, and the great sad eyes to sparkle. Could it be Maude? "Who is it?"

"An old friend. I did promise not to say noting, but I would not hef you fright or surprise too moch. Are you better of de ride in de coach?"

"Better! I don't know that I am better or worse, but I am tired. Let me go upstairs. Where is—— the person who is come to see me?" answered Oenone almost pettishly, being at once impatient, and proudly anxious to conceal her impatience. Papa Czernovic let her pass him to mount the stairs. His wife followed more slowly, waddling under the weight of a great mangy fur cloak which

had seen better days and shared many of the family vicissitudes. Old Czernovic hung back, and said a few words to her in Russian, in a low voice very quickly. She stopped and clapped her hands together, with an exclamation of surprise. Czernovic gently laid his finger on her lips. He was evidently in a state of pleasurable excitement, and as he toiled upstairs with his wife's arm in his, he poured a long speech into her ears, whilst she stopped at every third stair or so to clap her hands and utter interjections of surprise in her soft-sounding barbarous dialect.

Meanwhile O'none made what speed she could to the sitting-room. The speed was not great, for she was very weak. And as she went she had time to prepare herself for a disappointment. No ; it could not be Maude who was awaiting her upstairs. He would have indulged in no such jests as bidding Papa Czernovic keep his coming secret. He was always grave with her of late ; kind, and serious, and unfamiliar. No ;—and she sighed wearily—it could not be Maude. She had been a fool to think of such a thing for an instant. It might be Mr. Demayne, perhaps, or Captain Peppiat, or Lewis Griffiths. But it mattered little which of them it was.

The interest was gone, the spark had died out of OEnone's eyes.

She turned the handle of the door and went into the sitting-room. There was a man seated at the table with his back to her. He was smoking a cigar in front of the fire, and his legs were stretched out on a chair before him. OEnone saw that the feet on the chair were small, well-shaped, and covered with smart, shiny boots. At the slight noise she made in opening the door, he turned round, and seeing her, rose and flung away his cigar. He was a rather short, rather stout, rather bald man of some two or three and forty years of age. The fringe of hair round his head was black and wavy, his eyes were dark and bright, his hands fat, dimpled, and covered with rings. His whole air bespoke wealth, vulgarity, and self-confidence, tempered by good nature.

"Are you OEnone?" he said, speaking in English, but with a foreign accent. And at the words OEnone's heart stood still, and then gave a sickening bound. Her always pale face grew ghastly. She tried to speak but could not.

"You don't know me," said the man. "But that is not surprising! I don't think

I should have known you, if I had seen you by chance ;—although now I look again, there is something like your mother about the shape of your face. You don't guess who I am, eh?"

Œnone was supporting herself by leaning on the table, and was trembling violently from head to foot.

"I am your papa, Œnone. Don't look so terrified! Won't you come and give me a kiss?"

Then Œnone, still without speaking, went close up to him, and when he took her in his arms she burst out into a hysterical fit of sobbing.

For a little while he soothed and caressed her as if she had been an infant. But presently he seemed to get tired of her tears, and almost angry that she said no word of welcome to him. "I suppose you are glad—or at least not sorry—to see me, Œnone. But you haven't the most cheerful way of showing it!"

"Yes; I—am—glad," sobbed Œnone, forming the words with a painful effort. "But—I was—so—startled and surprised. And I—am not—very—strong."

"Poor little pigeon! No, you don't look strong! Well, we must put some flesh on

your bones, and—and dress you properly," he added, glancing at her poor attire. "And then you'll look very different. And so you would not have known me at all, eh?"

She shook her head. This was not the father she had pictured to herself. And she knew now that what she had taken for memory had been merely imagination. Still there were the fine dark eyes, and as he spoke one or two tones of his voice seemed to strike a familiar chord in her heart.

"Did you come because of my letter, papa?" she asked, giving him that title half shyly, half tenderly, and all tearfully.

"Your letter? No. I have had no letter from you for—oh, for years. Where did you write?"

"To—I think it was to Constantinople that Papa Czernovic sent the letter; to some bankers there."

"Oh! ay! To Constantinople? Well, I have not been in Constantinople for a long time. And what did you write about?"

"I wrote—I wrote to ask if I might come and live with you, and go to the places you go to. I should not be afraid. And I should not be troublesome. May I, papa? Don't let me be away from you again!"

"Of course, my white pigeon! That is just what I want," replied Balassopoulo, stroking his daughter's hair kindly. He seemed pleased and flattered by her desire to stay with him.

"Oh, thanks, papa! I will be so good, and so little troublesome! I am used to a rough life, you know; and to travelling."

"As to travelling, I've had enough of it. But if you like—we'll see about it, Oenone."

"And when shall we go? I am so tired—ah, you don't know how tired—of being here!"

"Go, where?"

"To the East; or to wherever it is that your business takes you. I will go with you to the desert, or anywhere," said Oenone, looking up into his face with tearful eyes and a sort of childish solemnity.

Balassopoulo burst out laughing, displaying as he did so two rows of white strong teeth under his well-waxed black moustaches. "I wonder what sort of idea you have of the desert!" he exclaimed with an air of great amusement. "No, my daughter, we won't go to the desert just yet. I should prefer Eaton Place. What do you think, Oenone—I have come to settle in London altogether!"

"Here!"

"Yes; here. It's the best place to live in in the world, if one can afford it."

"But I thought—— Papa, would you not rather live in Greece?"

"In Greece! No, thank you, Oenone." And again he laughed, and, patting her cheek, bade her not look so tragical and astonished.

"But we are Greeks! We do not belong to this place, and this people!"

"We couldn't belong to a better people. No, no, Oenone; we'll drop the Greek business. When I went to Malta three years ago I got myself naturalized as a British subject, and found it answer in every respect. I've no love for my own countrymen; nor you wouldn't have if you knew them as I do. They're a confounded set of thieves, and there's no dealing with them."

Oenone sat looking at him, white and speechless as a figure cut in stone.

CHAPTER VI.

SIGNOR SPIRIDION BALASSOPOULO—or, as he now called himself, Mr. Balasso—was not altogether delighted with his daughter. “She is mere skin and bone,” he said to old Czernovic, “and, except for a good pair of eyes, is almost plain. I don’t see why she shouldn’t have some share of good looks. Her mother was a handsome woman :—*you* remember her! And I have not been considered a monster of ugliness myself. Clever? Oh, I dare say she’s no fool, but she has her head full of queer unpractical notions. She don’t seem to understand the value of money at all.”

By which latter phrase Mr. Balasso meant to express that his daughter had not shown herself duly alive to the great good fortune of finding a rich father instead of a poor one. “What did *Enone* expect, I wonder? I might have gone on working for twenty years and not have realized as much as I have got within

the last three, by—well, partly by luck, and partly by having *nous* enough to take advantage of my luck when it came. But she takes it all as coolly——! I wonder what she would have said if I had turned up without a shilling !”

Papa Czernovic, who had his own convictions and perceptions as to the impression made on Enone by her father, took refuge in his favourite observation that Nona had the artist temperament; adding that she cared very little about being rich.

Spiridion Balasso received this with an impatient shrug. He did not believe in the existence of people who cared very little about being rich. That simply meant, he considered, that they gave themselves airs, and refused to be grateful for the good things when they got them, although when they had them not they thought themselves hardly used. He was willing to load his daughter with jewels and fine clothes as far as his means permitted, but in return he expected her to appreciate and enjoy them ungrudgingly. He expected her, too, to gauge her enjoyment pretty accurately by the money value of the article enjoyed:—although of this he was perhaps not wholly conscious himself. Balasso would invite you

to dinner, and delight in setting before you food and drink of the best ; but he would expatiate on the prices of his choice viands and rare wines whilst you were eating and drinking them, and would be apt to conceive a poor opinion of any man who should prefer a vintage at seven-and-sixpence a bottle to a vintage that cost a guinea.

It was true that he had not troubled himself about his daughter for a good many years ; but he thought that she had not the least right to resent that, seeing that although he had stayed away from her whilst his fortunes were precarious, he had come to seek her out when he grew rich. He said to himself that he might have remained at Malta comfortably enough without the trouble of a grown-up daughter on his hands, and have contented himself with sending a yearly allowance for her support. He had had a long talk with Czernovic, and learned from him a great many particulars of OEnone's life, before the latter returned from her drive ; so that by the time he met his daughter, he had made up his mind as to his course of conduct respecting several personages. He listened to old Czernovic's judgment of OEnone, and advice as to the best method of treating her ; but without much

consideration for the one, or intention of following the other. It was very well for Czernovic to give him the *carte du pays*: that saved trouble. But he was fully minded to determine his own line of march. He should manage Enone very well. He did not require much demonstrative affection from her. He was called a kind-hearted man, and liked to see smiling faces round him, but he wanted no depth of sentiment. Indeed, deep sentiment would have worried and disconcerted him. "I think Miss Enone will consider herself a lucky young woman," said he with his little laugh of self-confidence. "I shall take rooms for the present at the Tyburnia; and next season we'll look out for a house—a nice box in a good neighbourhood. She'll be a little better off than in Howard Buildings, *per Dio!*"

The Tyburnia was a most delightful hotel; quite new, very expensive, and enormously big. Hydraulic machinery was employed to carry you up to your bed-chamber, and a telegraphic apparatus, with miles of wire, to summon the waiter. You were fed at a table which receded into a dim perspective like the pictures of Belshazzar's Feast, and your eyes were soothed by the glitter of gilding on

everything that could be gilt ; from the chandeliers in the roof, to the knobs of the poker and tongs in the drawing-room. Papa Czernovic knew something about the Tyburnnia, and he nodded with a rather faint assent to this speech. "Yes," said he, wrinkling up the corners of his cunning old grey eyes, "ach Gott, it is one very fine house ! For dem what ondershtands de comfortable, dinner is grand ting—very grand fine ting ! But Nona is a fine-strung little instrument. She is like some strange bloom—some strange flower what cannot live except in one climate. No good, de hothouse. Your bloom takes in his head, he dies in de hothouse—and what you can do ? Gar nix ! I hef seen Alpenblumen, flowers of de high Alp, what looks so frail as if noting but de hothouse will shoot dem. Vell, no ! No at all de hothouse ! But oderways, de great Gletscher, all ice and snow. A oak die dere, ja ! But your small Alpenblume he smile like de summer sky where you shiver. For me I like de comfortable ; and for me dinner is one grand fine ting. But Nona——? H'm, h'm, dat is not quite same, lieber Herr Balasso."

"Ta, ta, ta, my dear sir!" returned Balasso, jauntily flicking off the ash of his costly cigar ;

"it's all very fine to talk of Alpine flowers, but women understand which side their bread is buttered. The climate that best suited all the women I have ever known—young or old, pretty or ugly, black, white, or brown—is the climate of Tom Tiddler's ground, where they can pick up gold and silver. *Basta!*"

The other members of the Czernovic family by no means shared Papa Czernovic's doubts and misgivings—if doubts and misgivings he had—as to the happiness of Oenone's future. One and all congratulated her effusively—effusively for them, that is to say; for there was a touch of the *nil admirari* of the savage about these good people. And besides, they had survived a great many turns of the wheel. But there was one person to whom the unexpected appearance of Oenone's father, rich, sleek, and flourishing, came as an overwhelming blow. Dr. Obadiah Flagge shut himself into his own sitting-room, and sat down to think with his head on his hand, and a leaden weight at his heart. He had borne a brave front to Czernovic, who told him the news; and to Quickit, who would fain have discussed it, and stood at the door of his back parlour with his head on one side, rubbing his hands over and over each other, and prepared for a

chat. Flagge had declined the chat on the plea of business to attend to and letters to write. But he had so borne himself that Quickit, not having the clue which might have guided him to such a conjecture, did not at all suspect that the arrival of Mr. Spiridion Balasso was a matter which awakened anything more than the transient interest of curiosity in his lodger the medium. But when Flagge had shut the door of his own sitting-room, and sat down by himself, he felt that the coming of that plump, vulgar, smiling, bejewelled man had changed the world for him.

He had not thought himself a prosperous suitor yesterday:—but between yesterday and to-day, what a wide difference there was! As he thought, sitting there with his head in his hands, it seemed to him as if he had not sufficiently appreciated the happiness of yesterday: and now it was gone. Enone had condoned that one passionate outburst when he had first declared that he loved her, and offended her sensitive pride of maidenhood by alluding to her love for some one else. He had thought at the time that she never could forgive it. But she had forgiven—perhaps forgotten it. If she had not forgotten it, so

much the more hopeful was his case; for it was clear that she had laid aside all resentment. She accepted his flowers. She had driven in the carriage of his providing. She might have come to depend on him more and more for such things as his money could provide for her, and she had no means of procuring for herself. And then he told himself that Cénone could not be ungrateful. She was incapable of enjoying the gift and scorning the giver. If she took even such a trifle as a flower from his hand, it was a pledge that she felt trustfully, perhaps kindly, towards him. She must perceive how utterly for her own sake his offerings were made. And the perception could not fail to move a generous spirit. And now—she was no longer poor, lonely, forlorn, and forsaken by the world. What were his poor white blossoms and his borrowed carriage—borrowed at the cost of scheming and lying which she despised—to the daughter of the rich Mr. Spiridion Balasso?

All at once Flagge lifted up his head and tossed back his thin elf locks, arranged for the captivation of his fashionable patrons, who liked their poets, mediums, artists, actors, and other ministers of excitement and amuse-

ment to look as different from themselves as possible. He tossed back his long locks, took out a cigar, and as he lit it exclaimed aloud with a bitter smile, "Well, I guess I am *the* damnedest fool out, and there's no two ways about it."

Then he stretched out his legs on the hearth-rug, and settled himself in the easy chair, and began to smoke; and after a few minutes he repeated aloud the epithet he had applied to himself, and added to it several still stronger expletives, and smiled contemptuously and sarcastically between the puffs of smoke that issued from his lips. But presently the bitter smile died away, and he grew sad and thoughtful once more. And his thoughts shaped themselves somewhat thus:—

"Well, foolish or not foolish, the pain's real enough. And as to foolish—I dunno but it might seem foolish to beings as never felt 'em to have a cancer or a toothache. Maybe one kind of ailment ain't much foolisher than another. Men are *kinder* 'shamed of pain; but I dunno as 'taint as nat'r'al to cry as to laugh. And as to love being foolish—p'raps it is—and so are a good many other sentiments, I reckon. But that don't stop 'em taking right hold of you, and wringing

your heart-strings pretty sharp. Why in nature that little white-faced, proud, foreign-bred girl upstairs should have come to be pretty much all I care for in this big round earth—I dunno ! But she is ; and what's the good of denying it, like a cussed, stuck-up, beef-eating John Bull ? There's on'y one thing John Bull ain't ashamed of losing his head over—far's I can see—and that's a race-horse. Why, that poor frail little bit of female natur can make me thrill in every fibre of my body by just looking at me ! And when she has that piteous strange look in the wonderful eyes of her—as if she was asking all creation why *she* should be and suffer, I feel like putting my right hand into the fire to make her happy. Poor little Nona ! Guess there's a power as jest sticks us on pins like cockchafers, and has a good time when it sees us spinning. One man's pin may be politics, another's dollars, another's a woman's love ; but we've got to be spiked somehow, and we've got to spin. Poor little Nona ! She don't care the millionth part of a straw about me, p'raps, but yet——; if I'd been let to work out my own chance—if that fat smirky brute hadn't come in between us—I might—I *might* have made her feel a bit kindly to me, or at least pitiful. And now

she'll be taken off, and God knows if I shall be let to see her even! And she won't be happy, neither. It wouldn't be so bad if she was going to be happy. But that coarse fellow won't understand her. I can see it in the fat perky face of him. And she'll fret and pine, and she's so weak now she can hardly hold up her pretty head. Poor little Nona! My darling—my poor little delicate lily—it's—a—damned shame!" And Flagge dropped his face in his hands and cried—cried hot bitter tears, with a throbbing, aching heart, and an abandonment of himself to emotion, which would have affected the Honourable Mrs. Wigmore and other similar fair clients of his, could they have witnessed it, with a bewildering amazement surpassing all they had felt at his "spiritual" performances.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE dull cloudy forenoon a day or two after Balasso's unexpected appearance in Howard Buildings, Rosamond Lowry was pacing up and down her accustomed walk in Hyde Park as usual. Moore was in attendance, very glum and ill-tempered. She did not consider it any part of her legitimate duties to walk out with Miss Rosamond, whom Moore pronounced to be the most uninteresting girl she had ever come across. She had no taste for gossip, was utterly indifferent to anecdotes of the fine ladies whose toilets Miss Moore had superintended in her time, and would bluntly check the recital of Miss Moore's experiences and observations, whenever they showed a tendency to become scandalous. Moore considered that Rosamond's mental and moral development had been completely ruined and perverted by her low connections in Bloomsbury. She was a thoroughly common-minded girl, Miss Moore

declared—and Miss Moore thought this was a very terrible accusation. So she trotted sulkily along over the damp gravel path beside Rosamond, mincing her steps with languid elegance, in contrast to Rosamond's firm, free, elastic gait, and endeavouring, by all the affected airs she was able to assume, to convey the impression that she herself was delicate and unaccustomed to pedestrian exercise, although the rosy young person by her side might be as strong as a pony. To be strong, Miss Moore thought, was another very terrible accusation when applied to a young lady.

All at once Rosamond startled her out of her elegant languor by uttering a loud exclamation and suddenly quickening her pace.

"Laws, Miss Rosamond, what is it? Is there a cow coming?"

Moore's chronic terror out of doors was a vision of an infuriated cow charging down upon her.

"A cow—here? No, you goose!"

"Excuse me, Miss Rosamond, for differing with you, but they do drive them heverywheres; so I am not such a goose as you are pleased to suppose."

"No, no; there are no cows. Come along! make haste!" And, suiting the action to the

word, Rosamond began to run, and after having run for half a minute or so, began to call aloud breathlessly, " Uncle Pep ! Uncle Pep ! Stop ! Don't you see me, Uncle Pep ? "

Two gentlemen who were walking on at some distance ahead, stopped at the call, turned, and, recognizing the flying figure, came back to meet her. She ran up to them, flushed and smiling, holding out her hands, with a gleeful repetition of " Uncle Pep ! "

" Why, my Rosy, is it yourself ? "

" Of course it is ! And you were going to cut me ! Oh, ain't I glad I just caught you ! How do you do, Major Maude ? I hope you won't think me quite crazy," panted Rosamond, laughing and still breathless.

" Oh, Rosy, Rosy," said her uncle, holding both her hands, and looking at her with a beaming face, " it's my belief that the refinements of polished society are entirely thrown away upon some people. Look at that genteel young lady whose destiny condemns her to go about in company with an impulsive sort of wild girl of the woods—just see how disgusted she looks ! There's a world of fine moral indignation in her eye.

' She never complains, but her silence implies
The composure of settled distress ! '

And indeed Miss Moore just then came up to the group with an elaborate assumption of being reduced almost to the last gasp.

"Oh, Miss Rosamond," she faltered, holding her hand to her side, "what a turn you gave me! I could not imagine what was the matter."

"If I had stopped to explain I shouldn't have caught my uncle. There's a bench by that tree. Sit down and rest yourself if you're so awfully done up. Just wait for me there," returned Rosamond, unceremoniously motioning Moore to a seat. Then she drew her uncle's arm within her own, and moved away with him, saying, "Oh, you dear old Uncle Pep, what a delicious bit of good luck to come upon you just now! I had begun to think I should never have any good luck any more!"

Maude offered to walk on and leave the uncle and niece together, but Peppiat detained him. "No, no, Maude," said he. "Just stay with us. We're not going to talk secrets, are we, Rosy?"

"No; I've got something to tell you, but it's no secret. What do you think, Uncle Pep? We are all going down to Elcaster early next week!"

"To Elcaster!" repeated the two men together.

"To stay with your Aunt Mary?" said Peppiat.

"No—at least Lady Lowry says not at present. I don't understand it at all. I'm afraid they are worrying Aunt Mary amongst them."

"What does she say? Have you heard from her? Is she well?" asked Maude, anxiously.

"She only writes me little letters now and then; and she never complains to me, of course. But I fancy—I have a feeling that she is unhappy, and worried. I'm sorry if you are a special friend of Lady Lowry's, Major Maude, but I cannot help saying to Uncle Pep that I think Lady Lowry behaves like a *pig* to Aunt Mary!"

"Rosy!" cried her uncle, with affected solemnity.

"Well, I'm very sorry, Uncle Pep, but I do think so, and I can't help it."

"Let us understand each other, Rosy. Whilst protesting against the very forcible—nay, violent nature of your expressions as applied to a lady—to say nothing of their being calumnious towards a harmless and useful creature friendly to man, for whom as an Irishman I have always entertained affectionate sentiments!—I beg leave to assure you that I fully sympathize with your

feeling on behalf of your Aunt Mary ; and to say that—that you're my own warm-hearted little Rosy," added Pep, bringing his speech to a sudden climax.

" And I should like to say, Miss Rosamond," said Maude, looking at her with an expression of more earnestness than the occasion seemed to demand, " that I cannot lay claim to the honour of being 'a special friend of Lady Lowry.' "

" Are you not ? Well, I am glad to hear it. She says you are. But then, to be sure, she says—all sorts of things ! But I shouldn't care for anything if she didn't attack Aunt Mary, and try to set papa against her, and—oh, I wish I was a man, to take her part !" And Rosamond clenched her hands and looked as fierce as she could.

" But what is it all about, Rosy ? " asked Peppiat.

Rosamond was unable to give a very clear account of what it was all about. But she knew that there was some dispute and trouble about her grandfather's will ; that Dr. Flagge and the spirits were mixed up with it in some way ; and that Lady Lowry dared to accuse Mary of unfair conduct in the matter. " She only said a word of the kind once before me,"

said Rosamond. "And I don't think she'll do so again. I told her I would not remain in the house to hear such things said. I told her I would complain to papa, and if papa did not check it I would run away!"

"Rosy, you are a terrific young woman! Upon my word, I'm quite afraid of such an Amazon."

"Oh, it's all very well to laugh, Uncle Pep, but how would you feel if you heard such things? So she has said no more before me. But I cannot help being conscious of some disagreeable underhand work going on. It seems to be in the air. And now we are to make this sudden journey to Elcaster, and not to stay in grandpapa's house! It is all so queer and uncomfortable. However, I shall see my own darling Aunt Mary. That's one blessing! And now I've had a glimpse of you before going. That's another blessing. And now I shall have to say 'Good-bye,' for it's getting late;—and that's not a blessing at all!"

The girl clung to her uncle's arm and looked up in his face smiling, but there was some moisture in her bright young eyes as she smiled.

"Good-bye, my pet," said her uncle. "I'll

escort you back to the custody of that very superfine young lady yonder. Mind you behave yourself, and don't shock her susceptibilities too much. I can see you're a trial to her, Rosy."

"Oh, she is so stupid! She talks such nonsense sometimes, you wouldn't believe!"

"H'm! I don't think I can accuse myself of incredulity in that direction," returned Peppiat, glancing across at Miss Moore's simpering countenance, now arranged into an expression of elaborate unconsciousness that she was being looked at.

"No, but if you heard her talk about Papa Czernovic—! You know he came to our house and took away Nona, and—"

"Oh, Rosy, Rosy, to think of my having forgotten to tell you the great piece of news! But talking of Mary Lowry put it all out of my head. Nona's papa has come back ever so rich, with diamond rings on all his fingers—and toes, too, I dare say—and Nona will be the grandest young lady that ever was known. Hasn't she written to you? Well, I've no doubt she will. She spoke of you with great affection the last time I saw her. Good-bye, my darling. Yes, yes, I'll give all your messages to Aunt Nora. Try and get leave

to come and see her before you go. I'll write and ask Cosmo myself. I don't believe he'll refuse me. Good-bye! God bless you!"

When Peppiat rejoined Major Maude, the latter burst out, "Is it not monstrous—incredible—that that woman should behave as she does to Miss Lowry?" And then the two men talked of nothing else all the way across the Park. Maude had heard the case discussed by all sorts of people, by strangers who were not personally acquainted with one member of the Lowry family, as well as the Percy Wigmores and one or two others who had known my lady and Sir Cosmo. But he had never heard a word uttered against Mary Lowry; indeed, the chief interest of the affair to the gossips whom Maude had heard on the subject seemed to be centred in Dr. Flagge and the spirits. Nevertheless, it was true that ugly rumours imputing the disappearance of Sir Rupert's will to dishonest action were flying about. They were vague, truly, and took the form of questions, as "Wasn't there something said about undue influence?" or, "I'm told the old fellow was entirely under his daughter's thumb at the last. Did you hear anything about a lawyer down at what-d'ye-call-it? Some one declared that between

the lawyer and the daughter old Sir Rupert dared not call his soul his own. But the rumours were not the less mischievous for their vagueness. Only Maude had not happened to hear them, probably for much the same reason as had warned every one present at the memorable first *séance* in Green Street, that it would be well to speak respectfully of Miss Lowry in the presence of Vincent Maude. In the inscrutable fashion in which such matters do become known, it had come to be understood that Major Maude was in love with Miss Lowry of Lowry, and had been in love with her for years. Some said she had refused him. Others declared that her brother opposed the match. Others, again, said that Sir Rupert had left a codicil disinheriting his daughter absolutely if she should marry Major Vincent Maude. But there was a unanimous reticence in talking about Miss Lowry before the big, soft-spoken Major, which testified to the penetration and prudence of his acquaintances.

“Lady Lowry more than insinuated to me that Oenone Balasso was responsible for her suspicions of Miss Lowry,” said Maude to Captain Pep, as they marched along side by side, talking eagerly. “But I went and spoke

to Nona myself. The child is the soul of truth, and I am sure she was never guilty of such black ingratitude."

"Oh, the poor little *leprechann* of a creature was regularly in the hands of my lady and that man Flagge."

"*He's* a scoundrel, if ever there was one," exclaimed Maude, stopping and facing full round, to give emphasis to his words.

"H'm! D'ye think so? I'm not so sure of it. Oh, he's not a man of honour, if you mean that——"

"Honour? No! Nor common honesty!"

"Ah, well, perhaps so. As to 'common honesty,' I've always considered it a beautiful testimony to the innate optimism of human nature, that the two things in this world which in my unfortunate experience have proved to be extremely rare, should be universally expected, taken for granted, and called 'common' sense, and 'common' honesty. However, I'll grant ye that Flagge wouldn't stick at a lie,—nor, perhaps, at any number of lies. And yet I've a sort of impression that there's some good in the fellow."

"That's a testimony to your optimism, Pep, at any rate! I wonder what they are rushing down to Elcaster for now."

"‘‘ Sorra one of me knows,’ as they say where I came from. But you may safely bet it’s to do something disagreeable, if my lady has a finger in the pie.”

“ Rosamond said that they were worrying her aunt.”

“ Ah, devil doubt them ! ”

“ She said she seemed unhappy, didn’t she ? Didn’t she, Pep ? ” in an impatient tone ; for Pep’s attention was wandering.

“ Oh, unhappy ? Yes ; oh yes, she did. Miss Lowry is a peerless lady, and I wish for her sake, and the least taste in life for my own —that I was a young paladin, handsome and bold, and well-mounted ; with Durindana in one hand and a bundle of ten thousand pound Bank of England notes in the other, and I’d go and carry her off from all the botherations in a ‘blaze of splendour.’ But I’m only poor Jack Peppiat, with a lieutenant’s half-pay. And then there’s Nora, God bless her. No ; I can’t do anything. It would be of small use even to smother Lady Lowry, or kick Cosmo. By the Lord Harry, I’d like to do that, though,” added Pep, rambling on after his happy-go-lucky fashion.

When they had gone some time along Piccadilly the two men parted. “ Good-bye,

Peppiat," said Maude. " Give my best regards to your wife."

" The missis complains that we don't see much of you now. Look us up some of these evenings, old fellow."

" I will, I will."

" There's generally the old set—Lewis Griffiths, and Bob, and Demayne. Only Demayne has come to be such a swell lately there's no knowing whether he'll be able to spare us an hour or not. Do come; the missis would be so pleased to see you."

" She's as good as gold; and I'm not ungrateful to her."

" Look in to-night then, eh?"

" Not to-night, Pep; I can't manage it."

" Are you getting to be a swell, too?"

" Not that I know of. I don't think I shall ever rival Demayne in that line."

" Perhaps you might go in for the back slums of Europe now he's giving them up. If so, try Bloomsbury. If we are not the rose—and so forth—we are near the back slums anyway! So you won't come to-night?"

" I can't, Pep. I—I'm not up to it. Give my love to the missis, and tell her that I shall come some afternoon next week, and ask her for a cup of tea and a quiet talk with her.

There's nothing like a dear, kind, motherly woman such as your wife for doing a fellow good when he's down in the mouth. Good-bye."

"Of course," said Mrs. Peppiat, when her husband reported what Maude had said, and how Maude had looked, and what a dull, pre-occupied mood Maude had seemed to be in, "of course he doesn't feel inclined for all those men and your whisky punch, Northam. He wants to come and be listened to whilst he talks about Mary Lowry. I know that well enough."

"Do you think he is so very hard hit?"

"No one harder."

"I wonder if Mary would have him!"

"H'm!"

"He's a first-rate fellow, is Vincent Maude."

"Indeed he is! He couldn't think a mean thought to save his life."

"I wonder whether he ever asked Mary to have him!"

"H'm!"

"Nora, you're coming out in the part of the Sphinx; positively your first appearance in that arduous character!"

"Why?"

"You say nothing but 'h'm!'"

"I'll tell you what, Northam; it's my belief

that if Miss Lowry was turned out of house and home to-morrow without a shilling in the world, Maude would make up to her with all the energy imaginable. But there's been so much talk about her being an heiress, and that old woman from Elcaster—the lawyer's wife—set it about that she was going to make a grand match—Cassius Demayne heard it from Mrs. Hautecombe—and Cosmo Lowry gave Maude the cold shoulder so completely, and—and—altogether I think he's been holding off and creeping into his shell—waiting for some encouragement. And how is a woman like Mary to give him any encouragement? Men are such fools!"

"Very true, my dear."

"But there's a sort of foolishness that one loves a man all the better for."

"Well, I hope my foolishness is of that sort; 'twould be some consolation," said Pep, very meekly.

Meanwhile Maude had gone home to his own rooms, and had packed a few clothes in a small valise. That having been accomplished in a violent hurry, he suddenly seemed to have an unlimited amount of time on his hands, and dawdled about the sitting-room in a purposeless way very unusual with him.

Then all at once he picked up his hat and went out, and walked about the streets in a brown study, looking neither to the right nor the left. Then, after half an hour or so, he pulled out his watch, looked at it, and began to hurry back to his rooms as if his life had depended on his haste. Then he despatched his servant for a hansom cab, and got himself and his valise driven to the Great Northern Railway Station. Arrived there, he took his ticket, and at once ensconced himself in a corner of a smoking carriage, muffled himself in his great coat, lit a cigar, and was soon gliding away from under the huge glass roof, away from the houses and the lights of London blinking through the wintry dusk, towards Elcaster.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE avenue at Lowry Place was white and smooth, and the trees in Clevenal Woods were muffled, bough and branch, in a soft, fleecy mantle pure as swansdown. The house, the gardens, the offices, with the outlines of snow-laden eaves, and roofs, and shrubs, relieved against an ash-coloured sky, looked like pictures drawn on a slate. It was not piercingly cold, and the air had that peculiar sweet-ness which comes with snow. All was so still that the slightest sound—even the crackling of a twig beneath its weight of snow—acquired an unusual importance. The clang of the lodge bell came through the quiet air across the gardens to the house, and set old Connaught barking. His deep note, just uttered once or twice with a certain dignity and deliberation, incited the stable dogs to join, and there was heard a sharp yapping of

terriers as a footstep crushed the crisp snow in front of the hall door.

Mary Lowry was sitting in the library where we first saw her. The old-fashioned lattice windows were fast shut now, and a log fire blazed upon the hearth. In other respects the room was little changed. Its main features, the heavy dark book-cases, the worn Turkey rug in the centre of the polished oak floor, the tall carved mantelpiece above the wide, open hearth, and the hearth itself, with its great "dogs" or andirons, had an air of antique comfort which was better than anything promised by the exterior of the house. Lowry Place was not above a hundred and fifty years old (it was built not upon, but close by, the site of the more ancient home of the family), and was neither splendid nor picturesque. But the library was an interesting room, with a physiognomy of its own, and there was a good deal of the Lowry family history to be read in it by a seeing eye. Some new hieroglyphs had been recently added. Great bunches of laurel and holly full of red berries had been stuck about the walls here and there, not very tastefully. It was an old Christmas custom at Lowry Place, which Sir Rupert had never discouraged, albeit in

his latter years he had looked with a very unfavourable eye on anything that savoured of festivity. But the evergreens cost him nothing, and bound him to the distribution of no largesse ; so old James and the gardener continued to put them up Christmas after Christmas, and they had done so this year as soon as it was known that Miss Lowry was to return home so soon. But besides the wonted bunches of greenery, there was a delicate and tasteful framework of ivy leaves arranged round two portraits which hung on either side of the mantelpiece—the portraits of Mary Lowry's father and mother, painted about the period of their marriage. There was Sir Rupert, a handsome, stern man, half-way between forty and fifty, looking masterfully out from under the traditional black brows of his race ; and Mary Hovenden, his gentle young wife, with a sensitive mouth, and broad, clear forehead. These two Mary had decorated with her own hands, but she had left the clumsy holly bushes undisturbed, although they certainly did not gratify her taste, in the ordinary sense of the word. But there is a higher "taste" which they did gratify. Mary loved the beauty which the eye can report to us ; but she loved better

that higher beauty which can transfigure things ugly to the eye, and make them lovely. The fond fidelity of the old servants, and her own tenderness for the dead, made those inartistically placed evergreens too sacred to be changed. The new decoration of the portraits she did herself, and did daintily. And all this was written up on the walls of the library for the instruction of those who had eyes to see it.

And the mistress of Lowry Place; is she changed since we first saw her? Changed only in being more herself, if the phrase may pass,—the traits, that is to say, which were latent in her countenance, have become more marked. The tendency to melancholy has developed into a look of settled sadness, and the resolute lines of the mouth and chin seem firmer and more resolute. The upper part of the face is still softer, and the lower part still stronger, than of yore; as if courage had increased with sorrows, and gentleness with courage. There was just now, too, a little anxious puckering of the brows as she turned over and sorted a mass of papers on the table before her. But this was evidently transient. The finely-shaped hands which were busied with unfolding, and selecting, and setting

aside paper after paper were a great deal thinner than they had been in the summer, and her plain black dress hung somewhat loosely about her bust and shoulders.

Connaught's deep sudden bark startled her, and she first looked up from her occupation, and then down at the old setter who lay by her feet—his constant post, from whence nothing short of main force or his mistress's peremptory command could dislodge him.

"Why, Con," she said, "what's the matter?"

Con barked once again, in a deliberate, though more muffled tone, as who should say, "I am sorry to have startled you, and apologize if I have been too loud, but nevertheless I meant what I said, and feel bound to repeat it."

"Is there," said Mary, gently touching the dog's handsome head with her finger tips, "some one coming? Well, he won't hurt us, I dare say, Con, whoever it may be."

Con thumped his tail on the floor in acknowledgment of his mistress's caress, and sat up on his haunches with his head eagerly addressed to the door.

"A friend, eh, Con? Is that what you mean? Well, then, it must be Mr. Flint; for" (with the faintest little fleeting sigh, and

the faintest little fleeting smile) "I don't think there is any one else outside the household whom you acknowledge in that character. You're a difficult dog, sir, and don't love easily—nor unlove easily, poor faithful old boy! I suppose some of the Lowry qualities, good and bad, have gone into you in all these years."

"Would you see a gentleman, ma'am?" asked a servant, entering. It was not James, but a young man recently engaged to act as his subaltern, and a stranger to the place.

"Who is the gentleman? Did he not give his name?"

"No, ma'am. He said he should like to speak to you for a moment."

"It is not Lord Elcaster, is it?"

"N—no, ma'am. I think it can't be Lord Elcaster, because the gentleman said he'd only just come down from London, and was going back to-night by the mail, if you'd see him."

Mary instantly thought that some news had been brought about her father's will. Possibly the stranger might be Cosmo himself! With a quick impulse, and without taking any time to reflect, she gave orders that the gentleman should be admitted. The door closed behind the servant.. Con sat up, eagerly

watching the door, and wagging his tail with an emphatic thump, thump, thump on the floor. In a minute he gave a low bark—not an angry, but an excited bark. The door opened again, and a tall figure strode quickly into the room. Connaught stood up on his feet, sniffed at the new comer, walked slowly round him, sniffed again, and then, after leaning his fine head against his mistress's knee, and turning his intelligent eyes up to hers, he quietly lay down again at her feet with his nose between his paws, and observed the interview tranquilly.

Meanwhile Miss Lowry was sitting speechless in her chair, looking up at the man who had entered with a white, startled face, and one hand pressed against her heart. “Is anything the matter in London? Do you bring bad news?” she added at length, very quietly.

“No; no bad news. I fear I have alarmed you?”

“Only an instant’s shock. We are so quiet and remote here that the apparition of a stranger seems as wonderful and portentous as that of a comet. Doesn’t it, Con?”

There was a pause.

Miss Lowry looked up in surprise. “Will

you not sit down, Major Maude ? ” she said, recovering the gracious dignity of her wonted manner, although the colour was fluttering on her cheek like the fine flickering of light through foliage moved by a breeze. Still no answer. Maude was standing opposite to her near the centre table at which she was seated with the heap of papers before her. He was resting his hand on the table and looking down in a strange dreamy way, as if he neither heard nor saw what was before him. Miss Lowry spoke again : “ I understood from the servant that you had just arrived from London and wished to speak with me at once, because you purposed returning to town to-night. Is that the case ? ”

At this appeal he lifted his eyes, and they met hers. In an instant his face changed from the dreamy, far-away look it had worn : it was the difference between sleep and waking—between a landscape glimmering in the twilight of dawn, and the same scene when the sun has flamed up from behind a hill and all at once it is full day. He grew bright with a clear and rapid resolve. “ Mary,” he said, “ on the way down here I was in a cloud. I was deceiving myself ;—even up to the last moment—to *this* moment, I did

not know positively, I was not sure—that is to say, I had not honestly answered to my conscience why I was coming here. I thought that there were various motives pulling at me, or at least I told myself so. Now I know that there was but one motive; and that is strong enough to have taken me across the Atlantic or the Himalayas, just as easily as to Elcaster. I came here because I love you, Mary, with all the strength of my heart."

Such a flood of emotion rushed over her, as she could scarcely bear. There was a sweetness in it so intense as to be almost painful, like the sting that lurks in the taste of purest honey. And then the sudden reaction from the braced-up, rigid renunciation of love—a renunciation which seemed to turn life's music into a thin, hard monotone—to the full richness of a deep content, made every nerve vibrate. Mary Lowry had not squandered away her heart in frivolous flirtations. She had been as far aloof from those paltry pretences of passion, which are only vanity in masquerade, as the topmost snows of the Silverhorn from the beaten mud of the highways. Her soul was as pure as her lips, and wore equally the freshness of unsullied maidenhood. To such a woman, with

a heart full of the rose-fragrance of innocence, and a mind ripened by maturity, love came with all the charm that poets sing, and a pathetic intensity which perhaps no poet can express.

She did not answer her lover in words; but her face was eloquent, and so was her outstretched hand, offered to him with a gesture of adorable simplicity.

Maude took her hand reverently, and stood for a moment looking down upon her upturned face.

"It seems like a dream," murmured Mary.

"To me it seems as if everything else—all the rest of my life during these years of separation—had been a dream, and that this is the only reality," he answered. "All the rest might pass away, but my love for you—Oh, Mary, you are my first and only true love! The one woman in the world for me! And can you really care for me?"

"Do you think you would be holding my hand now if I did not love you dearly?"

"My own treasure!"

He stooped and pressed her to his heart in a long embrace, and when he released her, her face shone with a happiness too deep for smiles. There is more solemnity in intense

light than in the blackest midnight ; and there are rare moments in life when the soul rises to regions of pure sunshine, whose awful serenity quenches the gay glitter of festive lamps.

" See, Vincent," said Mary after a while, " you have gained Con's good opinion already. He is usually so jealous of any one approaching me ; but look how quietly he lets you sit here ! "

Con had indeed endured this unprecedented phenomenon with calmness. But when Maude put down his hand to pat him, saying, " Let us be friends, old fellow ! " the dog merely tolerated the caress without any answering demonstration of kindness.

" He knew you were a friend. He told me so as soon as he heard your footstep, and long before I heard it ; didn't you, Con ? "

Con responded now, effusively enough ; he licked his mistress's hand, and waved his brown feather of a tail, and looked up at her with fond, watery eyes.

" He is not used to make new friends, and he really cares for no one but me since my father died," said Mary, half apologetically. " But you will love Vincent for my sake, won't you, Con ? "

"No, he won't;—at least not all at once. And I respect him for it. If you were to tell me that you loved some one else better than me, I might consent not to murder him—as Con refrains from biting me—but I don't fancy I should be very fond of him!"

"Is it real—can it be real, that you and I are here together in the old library where we parted so long ago? and that——"

"And that we are to be together till death us do part? Yes; thank God, Mary dearest! And, as I say, it seems to me the only thing that *is* real!"

"But, Vincent—after all these years, and all these changes—is it not strange?"

"What is more strange is that I should have been such a dull fool as not to say to you the very instant I saw you, 'Mary Lowry, I did love, do love, and shall love you as long as I live. Can you take pity on me?'"

"Perhaps you were not sure that you meant it then. I must be changed."

"Not sure that I meant it! Good heavens, why, if I had never seen or heard of you before, I should have fallen in love with you the moment I set eyes on you in that house in London!"

"In that case,—and I am bound to believe

so probable a statement,—it *is* a little strange that you did not say a word to that effect,” returned Mary. And she laughed a little silvery laugh that had all the freshness, and more than all the tenderness, of sixteen.

“I seemed to be under a spell of dumbness and diffidence. Things look so different from different points of view. Yesterday seems clear and simple enough; but to-morrow is perplexing and vague to the wisest of us. I see now that I ought not to have been dumb. But as to my diffidence,—I had good reason for that, you’ll admit.”

“I shall admit nothing of the kind, sir!”

“Ah, yes, Mary! Think! I was a weather-beaten soldier, without high birth, or much money, and not even young. You were—you!”

“I never knew that I liked flattery before! But your flattery is sweet. Perhaps it is wrong to say so. Is it?”

“Whatever you say is right and good and dear, and that is no flattery, Mary. Every one knows it but yourself.”

“Ah, Vincent, I shall convict you now! If you thought so well of me, why did you doubt that I had been as true as you had been? I told you when you asked me years ago that

I had given you my heart. That was once for all, you know ! But still—you doubted."

" Mary,—in the first place, when you said that——"

" You remember where it was ? "

" Remember ! Ah, if you know how often it all came back to me in the night-watches,—how I treasured up every look, every tone, every curl of your hair in my memory ! "

" It was not a very poetical spot where you first spoke to me of love, though ! It was on the gravel drive outside the stables. You had been looking at papa's hunters, and we were walking back to the house in the summer twilight, and you told me you must go away next day, and then—— "

" It has been a poetical spot to me ever since, Mary ! But when that all happened you were little more than a child. I was a grown man. I knew what I was doing. But you were very young, and singularly inexperienced even for your years. That was an excuse, in itself, for fearing that you might have changed by the time I returned. And then—— I have never been able to understand it, though I have tried often, painfully, God knows ! How could you send my poor letter back without one word of pity or kindness, and with those

cruel lines from Sir Rupert, ‘Miss Lowry returns Mr. Vincent Maude’s unwarrantable letter, and begs him to understand that the direction on this packet is the last writing she can ever address to him.’ I know the words by heart. I would not believe at first that the cover was directed in your handwriting, but I took it to your brother, I remember, and he said it was your hand.”

“Vincent! And you never received my letter?”

“What letter? No; I received none!”

“I wrote to you! I showed my father the letter. I told him that I would obey him, but I stipulated for the right to say farewell to you in my own fashion. He put my letter into the cover with yours, and I directed it.”

“The packet contained no such letter, Mary, when it reached me.”

There was a silence. Mary covered her face with her hands. Bitter thoughts passed through her mind. Her father had deceived her, had struck a cruel blow at the man she loved, and had ruthlessly risked making all her life sad and solitary, solely to gratify his overweening family pride! She had been dutiful,—she had consented to sacrifice her love,—but not to deny it. And yet her father

had cheated her, and misrepresented her, at the moment when she was obeying his commands at the cost of years of sorrow! The thoughts that passed through her mind as she sat there hiding her face in her hands were very bitter.

Presently the old dog, with an uneasy sense that his mistress was troubled, thrust his nose on to her lap. Mary dropped one hand on his head, keeping her eyes covered with the other. The touch of the poor faithful creature recalled the scene of her father's death, when Con had lain still and watchful for hours beside his master's bed, and then, when all was over, and he was driven from the room, had come and stretched himself at her feet, and whined piteously when they tried to remove him. It recalled, too, her own sensations when she saw that last look of recognition and piteous striving to express some thought with which his mind was labouring in her father's dying eyes; and when she stood later gazing on his dead face, like a marble mask, in the coffin. She raised her head, and her eyes were full of tears as she said softly, "Vincent, let us forgive him! He was very unhappy."

Maude took her hand and raised it to his

lips. "My dearest," he said, "I will remember nothing except that God has given me the great blessing of your love. How can there be room in my heart for anger at this moment?"

The afternoon waned. The early twilight began to make the white branches outside the window glimmer ghostly, and the wood fire cast red gleams on the dark wainscot. Major Maude and Mary Lowry knew nothing of how the hours were passing. Time and Death, that rule all other things, are subject to the great god of Love: he illuminates the darkness of the grave, and spurs or checks the course of time for the lover, as a rider his steed. The two so long parted by the fates, talked on in the delicious confidence of love; recalling past hours—words, looks—trifles to others; serious realities to them! And recalling, too, past grief, which served to enhance the deep sense of present happiness.

"Lady Elcaster desires her kind regards, ma'am, and has sent to know if you would take a cup of tea this afternoon."

Miss Lowry looked up at old James standing in the doorway, as if he were a strange phenomenon that she had never seen before. But in a moment she recovered herself, and

answered, " My compliments and thanks to Lady Elcaster, but I shall not be able to go to her to-day."

" Yes, ma'am. Do you choose to have the lamp ? "

" The lamp ! Why, what o'clock is it ? "

" Nearly five, ma'am."

" Yes, James, bring the lamp. Here is an old friend come to see me, James. Do you remember Mr. Vincent Maude ? "

" Laws, ma'am, to be sure I do ! And is this Mr. Maude ? "

" Major Maude now, James."

" I'm glad, sir, to have the honour of seeing you again in the old place. I remember you right well, sir."

" James is an old and faithful friend, you know, Major Maude. Lowry Place couldn't get on without him."

" 'Tis your goodness to say so, ma'am. And as to being faithful—why, sir, how could any one help but be faithful to Miss Mary ? "

With which speech James discreetly made his exit.

" The old dog and the old servant both like you, you see, Vincent ! " said Miss Lowry when the door was closed.

"They both have the instinct to know what *you* like, at all events!" laughed Maude.

"And now you must go!" said Mary, rising from her chair.

"Must I? Well—if I *must*!"

"And must you return to London to-night?"

"To London? No!"

"Did you not mean to do so?"

"Oh—but that was before——! That was several centuries ago, Mary mine!"

"And I have never learned why you came down so suddenly, nor what it all meant! I seem to have had no time to ask you anything. When James spoke of bringing the lamp I could not believe my ears. I had not even noticed that it had grown dusk!"

"It hasn't grown dusk!"

"Oh yes! And you must go."

"And to-morrow when may I come? Think of going to sleep with the certainty that I shall see you to-morrow! It is so exquisite, so wonderful that it would almost seem less of a wonder if Lowry Place had vanished into the air before to-morrow morning!"

"I think I can undertake that it will not vanish. And you must not come too soon."

"There can be no such time as 'too soon' to see you again, Mary."

" You know I am alone here, surrounded by chattering people who make it their business to gossip about all that happens in Lowry Place. You must let me have my way this once."

" Yes, I know I must! And at all other times too."

" I shall send and ask Mrs. Flint to spend the day with me, and——"

" Mrs. Flint!"

" Yes; there's no need for that tone of horror! Mrs. Flint is a very dear friend of mine."

" But I thought I was a dear friend of yours! I don't want to spend the day with Mrs. Flint, Mary."

" No Mrs. Flint, no Mary Lowry!"

" But I have a thousand things to say to you!"

" You shall say them, never fear. If you would but condescend to listen to me instead of wildly rushing at conclusions! Mrs. Flint will come to lunch here, and so will you. But—you may come here an hour earlier,—at one o'clock, and then we can talk. Will that please you?"

" I must do as you say."

" But not grudgingly! Indeed, Vincent, I am trying to do for the best."

"I know you are, my best darling, and you are right and wise as always, and I will greet Mrs. Flint as effusively as she will permit. She has never shown me any signal favour hitherto."

"Oh, she is sure to like you now."

"As Con and James like me,—and for the same reason!"

Then James appeared with the lamp, and Maude went away, and the world was all changed to him as he retraced his footsteps along the snow-carpeted avenue.

CHAPTER IX.

THAT same evening, after Major Maude had set out to walk back to Elcaster, Miss Lowry despatched a note to Mrs. Flint, which mightily excited and interested that lady. The messenger from Lowry Place arrived at Mr. Flint's house about half-past six o'clock, and found the lawyer and his wife seated over their dessert, as we saw them when we first made their acquaintance ; only that now blinds and shutters were closed, and the master and mistress of the house were seated on each side of a cheerful fire, whose glow brought out the ruby tints of the old port wine very pleasantly.

“ What can it mean, Samuel ? ” asked Mrs. Flint, after she had sent back her answer. “ She asks me to go to lunch, and spend the day with her to-morrow, and begs me particularly not to fail ! ”

"I should say it means pretty much what it says, my dear: luncheon, and perhaps dinner to follow, and possibly tea also."

"No, but, Samuel, this is something more than common. She asks if you will join us at dinner."

"That, I am happy to say, is not so very uncommon as to startle me, Bertha."

"No, of course not; but see here what she says: 'I have some news to give you, so pray do not disappoint me, dear friend.' What does that mean?"

Mr. Flint sipped his wine and shook his head, as much as to say that he did not know what it meant, and was not inclined to suppose there was any very important meaning to be discovered in the matter.

"Do you know what I think, Samuel?" resumed Mrs. Flint, after a pause of reflection; "I think she's going to marry Lord Elcaster."

"God forbid!"

"Now, Samuel! Why should you say that? If Lord Elcaster has not been all he should be hitherto, with such a wife as Miss Lowry he is sure to reform. And you had better accustom yourself to the idea of our sweet Mary Lowry being Countess of Elcaster,

for I feel a presentiment that the marriage will come off."

"Why should you fancy that the news she speaks of has anything to do with marrying at all?"

"There is a different style about her note,—something unusual. I can hardly explain it. It seems so much more vivacious and bright than she has been lately."

"She has been out of spirits ever since she came back from London," said Mr. Flint thoughtfully. "But that is easily accounted for."

"Of course! Out of spirits? I should think a rhinoceros would be out of spirits after passing three months with Lady Lowry! However, there's nothing low-spirited about this note. As I say, I can't describe it, but I feel it, just as one knows what people mean by the tone of their voice, no matter what they say."

Mr. Flint said no more; but he comforted himself with the reflection that it would be impossible for a woman like Mary Lowry to be cheerful and vivacious if she had bound herself to marry Lord Elcaster.

The good lady was very punctual in starting for Lowry Place the next day. The frost still

continued, and the leafless twigs of the avenue sparkled like crystal. The snow had been swept away from the centre of the drive, and the roadway sounded like metal under the hoofs of Mrs. Flint's sober gray horse, and the wheels of her sober green brougham. She was well wrapped up, for she did not love the cold, and she declined to divest herself of her fur-lined cloak until she arrived in the warm climate of the library. Miss Lowry was not there to receive her: which circumstance Mrs. Flint noted as being unusual. "I'm sure there's something going on," said the sagacious matron to herself. "Things are not just in their everyday groove here."

She had not waited above five or six minutes in the comfortable easy chair beside the hearth, when the door was opened quickly, and Mary Lowry entered the library, followed by a gentleman whose stature towered above hers, although she was of no mean height for a woman, and whom Mrs. Flint recognized with a start.

"They have only this instant let me know you had come. The man had to look for me. We were in the stables!" said Mary.

"*We* were in the stables." Mrs. Flint saw it all in a moment. There was something in

the sound of that "we," as Mary Lowry uttered it, which was a full and complete revelation. As Mrs. Flint had remarked to her husband, "one knows what people mean by the tone of their voice, no matter what they say." There needed not the bright sparkle of Mary's eyes, nor the exquisite flush on her cheeks, nor the sunny sweetness of her smile, to tell the story. Never had Mrs. Flint seen her favourite look so beautiful. She was, in the full sense of that hackneyed phrase, radiant with happiness. The contrast between the pallor, sadness, and languor of last week, and the roses of smiles of to-day, touched her old friend's heart, for it gave her, as it were, the measure of Mary's silent sorrow. The grief must have been heavy which could have bowed down so serene and sunny a spirit as shone out of those soft brown eyes. To the true instincts of Mrs. Flint's womanly heart, Mary's happy face appealed so irresistibly that she entirely forgot for the moment the very existence of that wealthy nobleman, my Lord Elcaster, and holding out her arms impulsively, she exclaimed, "Oh, my dear, is this your news? I am so glad," and hugged Mary, and cried over her with the most genuine sympathy and affection.

"Dear kind friend! I hoped you would be pleased. But how could you guess? Vincent and I meant to tell you, of course, but we had been planning all sorts of cunning approaches before we astonished you with our great news. We little thought you would pounce upon it so wonderfully."

"My dear," said Mrs. Flint, wiping her eyes, and indulging in a poetical figure of speech for the first time on record, "when the sun is shining in the heavens, it isn't necessary to send round a messenger to inform the little birds that it's day! Directly I saw you I knew all about it."

"Oh, I hope everybody will not be so keen," cried Mary, laughing a little, and blushing. "For we wish to keep it secret for the present."

"Then I should advise you not to let people see you together—that's all!"

Then Major Maude advanced to claim Mrs. Flint's acquaintance, and she greeted him very graciously. Her feelings were still too deeply stirred for her to be able to remember what a "poor match" was Major Maude for Miss Lowry of Lowry; or even to recall the singular conversation which she had chanced to overhear a part of between this very Major

Maude and "the queer little foreign girl." She was profoundly gratified, too, by being admitted to the knowledge of a secret so nearly concerning Mary Lowry before it was revealed to the rest of the world. And Major Maude so won upon her good opinion by his devotion to Mary, that before an hour had passed she had given up Lord Elcaster to his fate—consigned him, indeed, to the waters of oblivion, so far as she was concerned, and gone over utterly to the enemy.

When Mr. Flint arrived, which he did some few minutes before dinner time, he was shown at once to Miss Lowry's boudoir, where she was awaiting him alone, and where in a few words she told him that she had engaged herself to marry Major Vincent Maude.

"There is only one drawback, Mr. Flint," said Mary. "Vincent is terribly disappointed that I have more money than he thought I ever should have when he first knew me."

"These are troubles which people learn to endure with fortitude, my dear Miss Lowry."

"I believe he prays in his heart that a new will may be found which shall leave me homeless and penniless."

"Ah! Then I venture to predict that he will be disappointed. But if I may have the

making of your marriage settlements I will ease Major Maude's mind by tying your money up tight enough, never fear."

"He brings me unexpected news from London."

"Indeed?"

"Yes! it seems that my brother and his wife propose coming to Elcaster almost immediately."

"Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry! That is unexpected! And you had no idea—they had not mentioned their intention to you at all?"

"Not at all. Perhaps they may purpose doing so still."

"There must be some new discovery, or fancied discovery—some mare's-nest—or other that they've found amongst them, if you will excuse me for saying so. Has not Major Maude any particulars to give us?"

"I don't know. He has only just told me—not ten minutes before you arrived—that my brother means to come to Elcaster. We have been occupied with other things," said Mary, with a bright soft blush and a tender smile.

"All the better! You know I have been preaching to you not to allow yourself to be

tormented by that accurs—ahem! absurd, business."

"I could not help being tormented. The thing weighed on me like a nightmare. Not that the idea of losing my property was terrible to me, as I think you know; but——"

"I know!"

"I could not divest myself of a hideous idea that I was—was suspected in some way. I scarcely know of what. But I could not but feel that Cosmo did not trust me. That was hard, you must own!"

Mr. Flint blew his nose violently and fidgeted on his seat, and muttered some indistinct words on the subject of Sir Cosmo's conduct, which, perhaps, it was well were inaudible.

"Well, you need not scold me now, Mr. Flint, for, to own the truth, since yesterday I have not once thought about the will until now!" said Miss Lowry, smiling at the old lawyer, with an exquisite candour and sweetness.

"That's the very best news I have heard for many and many a day, my dearest Miss Lowry."

"And now will you take me to dinner? I must beg Mrs. Flint's pardon, for I fear I have kept her waiting."

Mr. Flint was highly satisfied with the news of Mary's engagement. He had so exalted, some persons might have called it so romantic, an admiration for Miss Lowry, that it would have pained him had she made a mere commonplace worldly match. If Miss Lowry had married a king on any other grounds than being heartily in love with him, she would have stepped down from her high place in Mr. Flint's imagination. But now she was surrounded with an extra halo. She had been true to the love of her youth. There was nothing sordid, or fashionable, or of the earth earthy, in the whole affair, and Mr. Flint was in a full glow of content. Not one of Mr. Flint's numerous and respectable clients—perhaps not even the wife of Mr. Flint's bosom—would have suspected him of being contented with any marriage on grounds so unsubstantial, and so entirely unconnected with landed property.

But great as was Mr. Flint's content it was—not chilled, perhaps, but—just touched by a certain apprehension he had that Bertha would be disappointed and mortified. Nay, he was not without some misgiving lest Bertha might imprudently reveal her disappointment, or make an unlucky allusion to

Lord Elcaster, who had been her favourite candidate all along. Although his satisfaction outweighed his misgivings, Mr. Flint was not altogether at his ease when he led Miss Lowry into the library, where they were all assembled to await the summons to dinner. There was Major Maude, tall and stalwart and bearded, standing on the hearth, which sent up a warm glow on to his bronzed forehead, and kind, honest, hazel eyes. There was Miss Lowry, graceful, beautiful, in her black dress, which served to make her golden-tinted curls, and her fair, serene face seem still more golden and more fair. She was so radiant, so exquisite, so entirely lovable in her simple, noble goodness, that Mr. Flint almost wondered to see Major Maude composed and quiet, and behaving as he might have behaved if the world had not been all turned into fairyland for him since yesterday. Mr. Flint forgot that deep happiness is a sedative; and that even he himself, though merely an affectionate old friend, and not an accepted lover, was less brusque, talkative, and demonstrative than on ordinary occasions. He had taken all the above particulars into his mind, and had come to the conclusion that Mary Lowry and her affianced husband would be the handsomest

couple in the county, whilst he was shaking hands with Major Maude, and congratulating him with a mixture of old-fashioned courtesy, and that little tremor of kindly emotion which is of an older fashion still. With the corner of his eye he had glanced at his wife sitting majestic in her black satin gown by the fire-side. He now turned to her a little nervously, and had said, "Well, my dear!" as being a safe phrase to begin with, when she interrupted him in a most unexpected manner.

"Well, Samuel!" she exclaimed, in a kind of arch triumph, and her voice was very deep, and her chin very double. "Well, who was right, eh?"

For one moment he absolutely thought that she had not understood the situation, and hurried across the room to bend down over her chair, and prevent her from committing herself by an unguarded mention of Lord Elcaster. But she would have none of his private hints and whispers.

"Who was right, sir?" she repeated in her richest contralto. "What do you think, Miss Lowry!—now, I'm going to betray you, Samuel!—I actually prophesied that the news you had to give me was news about your engagement, and Mr. Flint pooh-poohed me!"

It's a positive fact, I said, when I got your note, that I was certain we should hear you were engaged. Didn't I, Samuel? Confess!"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Flint, looking at his wife in a rather bewildered manner.

"Yes, I was convinced of it!"

Mr. Flint mentally observed with a sort of admiring astonishment that Bertha seemed to have wiped Lord Elcaster clean off the tablets of her memory.

"Do you know, Mrs. Flint," said Maude, "I begin to be afraid that you're 'no canny,' as the Scotch say! How did you come to have so much insight? What was there so particular in Mary's note? I wonder if I might see that note!"

"Oh, there was nothing particular in the note,—at least nothing that I can define. But I can assure you, Major Maude, that in some matters women have a kind of sixth sense. Haven't they, Samuel?"

"I should say, my dear, that they had a sixth, seventh, eighth,—in short, an indefinite number of senses, far outrunning all the conceptions of the duller male creature——"

"Of course they have!"

"And independent of even the trammels of fact," added Mr. Flint, drily. "They say that

Jove himself has not power over the past ;
but the feminine intellect seems to acknowledge no such limitation."

Nevertheless on the present occasion this peculiarity of the feminine intellect was not without its advantages, as Mr. Flint acknowledged. "It's all the better that Bertha takes to this engagement so kindly," said he to himself as he led Miss Lowry to dinner.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Major Maude and the lawyer remained alone over their wine, the latter spoke very openly of the tone of Sir Cosmo's conduct to his sister, and confessed that the whole affair of the missing will had puzzled and annoyed him (Mr. Flint) more than he had been willing to acknowledge to Miss Lowry.

" You see there can be no doubt that Sir Rupert did make a will up in London unknown to us all," said he.

" You think that's true ? "

" I think there can be no reasonable doubt of it. I spoke to the witness Quickit, and I came away with the persuasion that he was honest in the matter, and that Sir Rupert did make a will. Of course, so long as that will is not forthcoming we are not legally bound to trouble ourselves about the matter. But, as a matter of feeling, and under all the circum-

stances, it is trying to Miss Lowry, naturally. I know it has been troubling her very deeply."

Major Maude remarked that, when he arrived on the previous evening, he had found Mary seated in the library with a heap of papers before her, and that she had acknowledged to him that she had been searching for some clue as to what her father had done with that mysterious London will.

"Oh yes," said Flint, shaking his head, "I was certain that she did that sort of thing. And it is all in vain. We have searched together minutely through all the papers and memoranda which Sir Rupert left; and he was a methodical, orderly man, not a man likely to shove important papers away into holes and corners. It's a strange business altogether. There was that letter which Sir Rupert wrote to me the night before he died. I almost wonder that it did not make much impression on me at the time; but now I must say that, in the light of recent discoveries, it acquires a certain importance."

"That letter is Lady Lowry's *cheval de bataille*. I have heard her mention it with mysterious nods and hints, over and over again."

"The mysterious nods and hints were in

deference to you, Major Maude, I suspect. In other people's presence I have good reason to know that her ladyship spoke more plainly."

"How 'in deference to me'?"

"Well, she probably had some suspicion of the state of your feelings towards Miss Lowry."

"Then do you mean to say that she spoke ill of Mary to others?"

"My dear Major Maude, I am an old and faithful friend of the Lowrys. I know them well, and I have their interest—especially Miss Mary's interest—at heart; as you are to be our dear friend's husband, I wish to speak to you quite confidentially, as to one of the family."

"I entreat that you will do so."

Major Maude's face had assumed a very stern look. He would have been pronounced "dangerous" in his present aspect by any judicious observer.

"Well, to begin with, Sir Cosmo Lowry's present wife is an ignorant, coarse-minded, unfeeling woman—I told you I should speak plainly! By such a person Miss Lowry can as little be appreciated as—in short, there is a proverb the Germans have, which expresses my meaning: 'If you give an ass even rosemary,

he takes it all for hay.' Lady Lowry takes it all for hay. She imputes herself, and the sort of people she is most familiar with, to superior natures."

"I entirely agree with you."

"Well, that being so, you will easily understand what jealousies and suspicions such a mind might harbour."

"Suspicions?"

"Consider how the case presents itself to Lady Lowry's coarse apprehension: Sir Rupert dies, and leaves a will very favourable in its provisions to his daughter;—I am not saying that *I* think those provisions in any degree too favourable, under all the circumstances, but I am putting myself into Lady Lowry's attitude. The day before his death he writes a letter to his lawyer, the purport of which is that he has some new arrangements to announce which the lawyer will not approve, but which it is too late to alter. He dies before the letter can reach its destination, thus more than justifying his own presentation that there was no time to lose. No new testamentary dispositions have been made so far as is known. The will deposited in my office is duly proved and acted upon, and matters take their regular course. But within

a few months the discovery is made—how brought about, by what charlatanism and humbug, and with what unworthy motives, it is useless to inquire—that Sir Rupert Lowry actually did make, and cause to be witnessed, a will subsequent to the one proved, and that he kept that will secret. What has become of it? He probably destroyed it himself, as he had made it, in a fit of caprice:—or possibly in repentance for a fit of caprice. *Probably*, I say, he so destroyed it. But if he did not? If it still exists? Or—*suppose some one else destroyed it?* Whose interest was it that that latter will should disappear? Its contents are unknown; but I have not the least doubt that Lady Lowry has got the notion obstinately fixed in her mind that they were more favourable to Cosmo than the will which shuts him out of Lowry Place. Her greed and her ignorance, and the cunning of those who have played upon both, combine to confirm her in this idea. Well, then, what is manifestly the next step to such a mind as hers? Why, she would without scruple suspect Mary Lowry of——”

Maude rose up from his chair, and held out his hand to check the completion of the sentence. “Don’t utter the atrocity, for

God's sake!" he said. "I can't stand it." Then he walked once or twice up and down the room, and came back to where Flint was sitting, and gripped his hand. "I have not the least doubt you are accurately right, Mr. Flint," he said. "Lady Lowry is a detestable woman."

"For my part, Major Maude, I cannot help feeling more indignation against Sir Cosmo than against his wife. Ignorance is to some extent an excuse for her. But that Cosmo, who has known Mary all his life, who can recall her goodness to his first wife, the noble, constant way in which she has stood his friend, the generosity with which she received this present wife, the perfect honour and truthfulness of her character, that Cosmo should think an ill thought of his sister seems to me unspeakably base. It is a relief to me, I assure you, to express my feelings on the subject; for my wife rather sticks to him from old habit and associations, and to Miss Lowry herself I cannot, of course, say that I think her brother a heartless cur."

"You know that these people mean to come down to Elcaster?"

"Miss Lowry mentioned that you had said so. Do you suppose there is anything new

that has made them take this sudden resolution?"

"I have no idea. My advice to Mary would be to decline to see Lady Lowry; to break with her altogether."

"Oh! Really? Oh, I think not! No, no; I shall not advise that, Major Maude."

"How can she allow the woman to come into her house after uttering such vile slanders as you hinted at?"

"You must remember that Miss Lowry is ignorant of those slanders. She has an uneasy conviction, indeed, that her brother and his wife mistrust her. But to what extent that mistrust has gone, she has really no idea. The attitude she has taken from the simple rectitude of her nature is, I think, the attitude which the most politic consideration would recommend. She has nothing to conceal, nothing to fear. No one is more anxious than she herself that the truth should come to light. She said to me only the other day that she wished her brother would come and search through his father's papers himself, if that would satisfy his mind. You may depend, Major Maude, that thorough openness and simplicity are the weapons to fight this sort of thing with."

"Perhaps you are right. And, after all, the main thing is not to distress Mary."

"Quite so!" assented Mr. Flint with a quaint little bow and smile.

"The main thing for me, of course I mean," said Maude, smiling in his turn; "but as to thorough openness and simplicity,—I assure you, Mr. Flint, that if I were to act as I feel, I should kick him out of Lowry Place the first time he ventured to put his foot into it."

"That would be a proceeding characterized by openness and simplicity, certainly! Ah, well, I can talk of all this business to-day with a much lighter heart and cooler head than I could yesterday. It won't embitter Miss Lowry's life now, come what may."

"It shall not, if I can help it."

"I think you will succeed in helping it. Already Miss Lowry has almost ceased to distress herself about it. As for me, it's a great comfort to have a man to talk to on the subject. I'm not afraid of over-burthening *your* shoulders with botherations, you see."

"Pray don't scruple to lay any botherations upon them which you think may lighten Miss Lowrys. My back is broad enough."

And indeed so it was, in the literal sense of the word. Nevertheless Major Maude, for all

his stalwart stature, was as sensitive as a woman in some respects. And he took the idea that Mary had been breathed on by the breath of calumny very painfully to heart.

Not that it stung him any more than evening as he sat beside her in the library, proud, and glad, and delightfully in love. If, as Dante says, there be no greater grief than to remember happy times in the midst of misery, it is certainly true, on the other hand, that rough weather past, is pleasant to look back on when we ride safe on smooth waters. To Mary Lowry it seemed as if every sad and solitary day she had spent served only to enhance the tranquil sweetness of the present hour. Instead of regrets, hope; instead of mistrust, confidence; instead of loneliness, sympathy! When Maude whispered to her some word of regret for the lost years during which they had been parted, she softly answered him, "Do you know, dear Vincent, if it were not for all that weary time I think I should scarcely understand how happy I am now."

But even being in love did not prevent Mary Lowry from attending to the duties of hospitality, and doing the honours of her house with all consideration and courtesy.

Mr. and Mrs. Flint would have been quite content to efface themselves on this occasion, and quietly enjoy the spectacle of the lovers' happiness. ("They will make a *grand* couple," said Mrs. Flint afterwards to her husband; adding naïvely, "Major Maude is a great deal better looking than I thought him when I saw him in town !") But Mary quietly drew them into the conversation, and Vincent seconded her with a very creditably good grace.

For various reasons none of them wished to speak of Sir Cosmo and my lady. The gossip of Clevenal and Elcaster would not have been very intelligible to Maude, nor very interesting to Mary. The future of the affianced pair—where they would live, and what plans of life they thought of—might under other circumstances have formed a natural topic for the talk of the four persons assembled in the library at Lowry Place; but too many considerations touching Sir Cosmo were connected with it to make it altogether safe ground. So Mrs. Flint fell to discussing the various places of amusement she had visited during her stay in London. "Of course it was out of the season," said Mrs. Flint deprecatingly, for those few syllables "in" or "out of the season" were words of power with the

good lady; and she felt it in a measure necessary to apologize for having been amused at a period unsanctioned by the priests and priestesses of that great goddess Mrs. Grundy. "But still I confess I enjoyed two or three evenings very much. I think there is almost always some good music to be heard in London. I don't set up for being a connoisseur——"

"Considering that you know nothing about music that is rather singular, Bertha, and does credit to your self-command," said Mr. Flint, whom Miss Lowry presently rebuked for his impertinence with a raised forefinger.

"Oh, it's only the usual arrogance of the domestic tyrant called a husband, my dear!" said Mrs. Flint good-humouredly. "And he's wrong too."

"Which is also usual, is it not, Mrs. Flint?" said Maude.

"Quite usual. The fact is, I used to play Hummel's and Clementi's sonatas with great success—never mind how long ago. But, to go back to what I was saying, I had two or three pleasant musical evenings in town. I went to hear some Wallachian or Moldavian singers. I don't really know where they come from, but that doesn't matter; they

sang delightfully. It was at St. Cecilia's Hall."

"Oh," exclaimed Maude, "my old acquaintances, the Czernovics!"

"Vincent," said Miss Lowry, "that reminds me to ask you a question which has been in my mind once or twice: How is poor little C^Enone? And where is she? I heard from Rosamond that she had left my brother's house."

Mr. Flint glanced quickly at his wife, but Mrs. Flint was gazing at the fire very placidly and demurely. She had been strong on the subject of Major Maude's position with regard to the "little foreign girl," and had not spared words of indignation and almost disgust at the perverted taste which could find anything to admire in that sallow outlandish-looking little creature, whom she had even—in moments of conjugal confidence—compared to a melancholy black-eyed monkey on an organ. But now she was apparently quite unmoved on the subject. "I suppose she has obliterated Miss C^Enone from her memory as well as Lord Elcaster!" thought Mr. Flint to himself.

Maude narrated the change in C^Enone's fortunes which had been brought about by her father's unexpected return.

"Quite a romance!" said Mrs. Flint complacently. Enone had her full leave to be as romantic as she pleased, now that it was clear she had not stolen Miss Lowry's lover away from her.

"Enone is one of those poetic-looking creatures who seem born for romantic adventures," said Mary.

"Yes;—with those wonderful eyes!" assented Mrs. Flint.

Mr. Flint thought of the melancholy monkey on the organ, but prudently held his tongue.

"Poor little Nona!" said Maude, thoughtfully.

"Not 'poor' little Nona any longer, I hope!" said Mary. "Is she not happy at her father's return?"

"Y—yes;—I don't know. I'm afraid he has been a disappointment to her on the whole."

"Is he not kind to her?" asked Mary.

"Oh, yes; he seems to me to wish to be very kind to her."

"And you say he is rich?" observed Mrs. Flint.

"Rich in comparison to anything which Nona has been accustomed to. I don't suppose he is a millionaire, but he can afford to

give her a carriage and plenty of smart dresses."

"What is his business?" asked Mr. Flint.

"He appears to have retired from commerce. He was a merchant dealing in miscellaneous goods, and wandering about in the Levant, and even in Africa, for some years. Latterly he settled himself at Malta, where I fancy his business consisted chiefly in lending money at usury. I dare say he does something in that way quietly now. But whatever his trade may have been, it seems to have prospered with him. He has got himself naturalized as a British subject."

"That sounds sensible," said Mr. Flint, nodding approvingly. Elcaster was not at all cosmopolitan; and those of its natives who were too enlightened to hate and despise foreigners, pitied them very much indeed.

"I suppose it answered Mr. Balasso's purpose," rejoined Maude. "But it has been a great blow to poor Nona."

"Ah, I can easily understand that," said Mary.

"Can you, Miss Lowry? Well, I confess I can *not*," exclaimed Mr. Flint, emphatically. "A 'blow' to her? Why, it was the very best thing her father could do, both for her

and himself. I begin to think this Mr. Balasso must be a very sensible person. Instead of a kind of nomade vagabond, half European, half Oriental, he becomes a member of the British nation. Our consuls and ambassadors abroad are bound to protect him. He can travel about the world without a passport. He is not subject to the slavery of a military conscription——”

“He can pay income-tax, serve on a jury, or even become a churchwarden!” added Maude.

“Come, Major Maude, I suppose you’ll allow that it is a promotion for a Levant Greek to be turned into an Englishman;—or even into a humble imitation of one!”

“My opinion on the subject is unfortunately not of so much consequence as his daughter’s. The girl has lived upon romantic conceptions of her glorious birthright as a Greek. And this has mortified her to the quick.”

“Oh, pooh! I shouldn’t have any sympathy with that sort of stuff.”

“Yes, Mr. Flint, you would have a great deal of sympathy—you would be all sympathy if you knew poor C^œn^eone as we know her,” said Mary persuasively. “She has talked to me freely sometimes of her child-

hood. She would not always be confidential, but when the mood took her she would sit at my feet in the twilight, and tell of the strange wandering life she had led until she came to London. You cannot fancy anything so curious as the mind of this lonely little creature, as ignorant of the world that you and I live in as if she were in another planet, and yet having read and learned much that is usually beyond the ken of children of her age. She was devoured by her imagination ; and it had all the stronger hold on her because she kept her day-dreams to herself. The people she lived with were her intellectual inferiors, and she disdained them, and treated them with a lofty sort of condescension, although she was dependent upon their kindness for bread."

Mr. Flint shook his head. "I can't sympathize with that, Miss Lowry," he said.

"Because it presents itself to your mind as it might do if I had acted so, or if any one of your acquaintance had acted so. But you must remember that Cenone Balasso was scarcely more to blame than the helpless infant who accepts all its nurse's services with sublime indifference, and strikes at her with its tiny soft fist if it be vexed. One smiles at

the fearlessness of the weak mite ; but it has its pathetic side. So the self-esteem of the little lonely, helpless Nona Balasso always seems to me infinitely pathetic when I think of it."

"And who were these people she lived with ?" asked Mrs. Flint.

"None other than the Muscovite minstrels, whose singing pleased you so much in London," said Major Maude.

"What, those Moldavians ?"

"The very same. And they are good-hearted creatures ; faithful and kind to each other ; honest after their fashion ; and devoted to OEnone. I must say I agree with Mr. Flint as to Nona's behaviour to the Czernovics. Her cool indifference, I might almost say ingratitude, to them, is the worst trait I know in the girl's nature."

"And yet she can be grateful," said Mary. "Her gratitude to you, Vincent, is boundless."

"Oh, really ?" said Mrs. Flint.

"Then I suppose her gratitude is in an inverse ratio to the benefits conferred, for she owes me much less than she owes the Czernovics."

"Oh, she considers that you belong to a

very different order of beings. I believe she almost thinks you worthy to be a Greek. Poor little Oenone! And now her father has made himself into a British subject! Do you know, Mr. Flint, she told my brother one evening when he said something which hurt her pride—she is curiously proud and sensitive—that her forefathers had been great and glorious when his were rude barbarians!"

"And how did she come by that notion, pray? By having been educated by an English lady, and living in the midst of English culture! Don't tell me! We English taught her all she knows of Grecian glory—about the gloriousness of which glory there might be a word to be said which should not be all hip, hip, hurrah! and I think it is a good thing for the young lady that her father displays some common sense."

"Now I have injured Oenone's cause when I meant to plead it, and deepened what Mr. Flint must forgive me for calling a prejudice," said Mary.

"No, no; I have no prejudice against the child! None in the world. And I'm very glad indeed, since you and Maude are interested in her, to hear that she is likely to be respectably provided for. I dare say her

Hellenic magnanimity will accommodate itself very comfortably to such barbarian vulgarities as a well-furnished house, decent servants to wait on her, coal fires, and plenty of well-cooked food."

"Oh, Mr. Flint, and you maintain that you have no prejudice! I assure you that unlimited beef-steaks would not console Oenone for the shattering of her cloud-castles. She is fanciful, high-flown, ignorant of the world, foolish, if you like, but thoroughly genuine. There is not a trace of pretence or acting about Oenone. Don't you think I am right, Vincent!"

"I think that you plead for her like an angel!"

"I suppose that means that you do think I am right?"

"Yes, it means that, and a great deal more," said Maude, whose mind had recurred to the fact that the first unlucky utterances about Sir Rupert's will had been said to be given by Oenone, and who thought too of the painful light which had broken in on his mind at his last interview with the girl as to her jealousy of Mary.

"Well, at all events it will be good for the poor thing to be properly fed," said Mrs.

Flint. The mention of beef-steaks had conjured up in the good lady's mind sundry frightful ideas as to the sort of living which C^Enone had been accustomed to. "As to cooking," she added, with an almost plaintive tone, "I suppose those Moravians, or whatever they are, haven't a glimmering of it. I shouldn't wonder if all that has something to do with the girl's starved look. Who knows what trash they fed her on when she was a child? Foreigners, we know, will eat *anything!*"

Decidedly the natives of Elcaster had not learned to be cosmopolitan.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Flint went away Miss Lowry took the former aside, and said, "I shall write to-morrow morning to my brother, announcing my engagement. And Vincent will write to him too; I have asked him to do so. It is due to Cosmo, as the head of the house."

Mr. Flint swallowed down a temptation to say what treatment *he* considered due to Sir Cosmo Lowry from Sir Cosmo Lowry's sister, and merely replied, "It seems possible that your letter may cross him on the road, since he is coming to Elcaster so shortly."

"Well, it is possible. But I must write.

I cannot rest until I have written to Cosmo. There are only he and I left now, Mr. Flint. It is hard if, after clinging to each other during many troubled years of separation, we are to be estranged now when all seems prosperous and peaceful. And Vincent was a true friend to Cosmo in old days. His errand in coming here first, years ago, was to announce the birth of poor Bell's little boy, and to intercede with my father for them. I think Cosmo will remember that."

She looked into Mr. Flint's face as she spoke, so wistfully, that he had not the heart to say anything harsher than that he thought her brother would be the most insensible of men if he did not respond to her faithful affection. And then he and his wife and Maude said "good-night," and left the mistress of Lowry Place to repose.

CHAPTER XI.

DURING the first days after his arrival in London, matters went pretty smoothly between Mr. Spiridion Balasso and his daughter. He showed himself disposed to be generous towards all who had been kind to her. Besides liberally remunerating the Czernovics for their care of OEnone, he advanced to them half the sum necessary to buy the musical instrument business which they had been looking after, and thus enabled Papa and Mamma Czernovic to retire from their public character of Muscovite Minstrels as soon as they pleased. He took OEnone—in a smart brougham drawn by a showy horse—to call on Miss Cribb the schoolmistress, at Kensington, and presented that accomplished lady with a big brooch adorned with amethysts and topazes.

This was all very well. Miss Cribb had been kind and sensible, and OEnone felt that

Miss Cribb's conduct deserved some recognition ; she was pleased, too, that her father, with all his ostentation of money, did not shrink from acknowledging her former poor and dependent condition. But by-and-by he made a proposition to her which was the cause of the first serious disagreement between them ; he proposed to her to go and call on Lady Lowry.

"On Lady Lowry ? No, papa ; I cannot do that."

"You 'cannot do that'!" exclaimed Balasso, mimicking what he called OEnone's tragedy tone. "What for ? Haven't you got a gown good enough to go to her ladyship ? Anything you want you may have, you know."

"If I chose to go, it would be indifferent to me what gown I wore. But I cannot go to see that woman. She is distasteful to me in every way."

Balasso's brow grew rather gloomy, but he was not yet absolutely angry. He foresaw a little trouble,—a little botheration, as he said ; for he prided himself on speaking the most familiar and idiomatic vernacular, and fondly imagined that it was difficult to discover from his speech that he was not an Englishman born. But although he foresaw a little

trouble, he should, of course, have his own way :—good-naturedly, if that were possible, but if not, by stern self-assertion. CEnone must be made to understand once for all that his daughter had duties to perform as well as privileges to enjoy. Hitherto he had given way on several trifling points of difference between them. For example, in the matter of dress CEnone was a little intractable. Being liberally supplied with cash, and taken to the most fashionable milliners and dress-makers, she nevertheless refused to allow herself to be clothed in the manner her father would most have approved. His method of procedure was to look over some of those remarkable pictures of gowns and mantles and bonnets, and piles of false hair with a pink and white face above or below them, according to the requirements of the case, which represent *Les Modes de Paris* in all colours of the rainbow ; and when he came upon some particularly striking combination,—as of a rose-coloured train with scarlet tunic, or a purple robe trimmed with amber ribbons, or a hat adorned with six humming-birds and a flamingo,—to order *that* for Miss Balasso, to be made of the very best materials procurable for money. And then, as the fashionable

artificer would naturally be on the side of *Les Modes de Paris* and her rich new customer, C^Enونe would have some hard battles to fight. But on the whole Mr. Balasso did not insist on carrying out the suggestions of his own taste. C^Enونe, to be sure, let him spend what he would, was never dressed altogether "like other people" (Balasso's formula for expressing a becoming style of apparel), but then neither did C^Enونe look, move, or speak altogether like other people. And perhaps, on the whole, she understood best what suited her. Besides, he believed that a certain sort of eccentricity was considered rather "the thing" in a girl with plenty of money. "If she were very handsome," he said to himself, "she wouldn't want anything else. A face and a fortune will do pretty well everything for a girl. But being as she is, her odd ways give her a certain distinction, and single her out from the crowd." But in the present case he implicitly trusted his own judgment, and was resolved that C^Enونe should act in accordance with it. So when C^Enونe declared Lady Lowry to be distasteful to her in every way, he said quietly, "You stayed in her house for weeks, I am told."

"Yes; but I do not think I owe her any

gratitude. I worked for her whilst I was there."

"Oh, as to that, I dare say you did. And her daughter is your friend, who loved you and was good to you?"

"Not her daughter! Rosamond is altogether different from Lady Lowry. Lady Lowry is only the second wife of her father."

"Ah! Well, this Lady Lowry is the kind of person whose acquaintance will be useful to you now."

"Useful to *me*!"

"Yes; never mind the tragedy now, *O*n~~e~~none, and let us talk prose, please. I'm a plain jog-trot party, myself. You want some woman to take you by the hand, and get you into society. You have no mother, and I am a stranger. Well, this Lady Lowry will just suit us. I consider it a great piece of good fortune that you happened to get acquainted with her. She has a title, and that goes a long way amongst the English. We must make a beginning, and here is the occasion ready to our hand."

*O*n~~e~~none again laid herself open to the reproach of looking tragic. She clasped her hands together despairingly. If she could but make her father understand!

"You do not know her," she said, earnestly.
"Lady Lowry is arrogant. She has a vulgar mind."

"Oh, she'll come round. We'll coax her a little. Besides, I don't ask nothing for nothing. She'll get her *quid pro quo* in one way or another."

"But, papa——! You would have to abase yourself! You do not know of what phlegmatic insolence she is capable."

"Leave me alone to manage her, OEnone. Besides, if she was a little stuck-up, and so on—*nous avons changé tout cela!* She'll be civil enough to you now, I dare say."

"And why? Because she will think I am a rich man's daughter instead of a poor orphan?"

"Thinking people rich is not a bad reason for being civil to them."

"I hold it to be a very bad reason—a base reason."

"Tut! Well, whether or no, 'tis the way of the world, and we must accept it."

"I will never accept it—even if I must endure it."

Balasso made a strong effort to curb his anger. OEnone was quite unconscious how strong the effort was, and incapable of guess-

ing the sort of irritation which her words caused.

"Come, little foolish pigeon," said the father at last, "be reasonable. You have been living in a dream. It is time to wake up. I am kind to you, am I not?"

"Yes ;—you—I am not ungrateful, papa."

"No, no ; to be sure not! So far so good. You know nothing of the world. I know a great deal. You must take my opinion on points you know nothing about. And where you can't agree—you can always obey! And what is it I am asking, after all? I should have thought a girl of spirit would have liked to go and drive up to my Lady Lowry's door in a smart carriage and fashionably rigged out, before the funkeys and all, where she had been in former days so shabby and poor ;—a little nobody. You're not a little nobody now, *Enone*. Wait a bit. You have no idea as yet of the value of money ; but it can do wonderful things, little simpleton. You shall see what you shall see."

And this was the father about whom *Enone* had dreamed such dreams! A feverish flush of mortification came over her as she recalled the proud ideal she had made for herself of her Greek father, and contrasted it with the reality.

Balasso did not continue the controversy. Indeed, so far as he was concerned it was at an end. He patted C^Enone's drooping head as she sat listlessly in an arm-chair beside the window,—not looking from it; staring abstractedly on the ground, and seeing only with her mind's eye,—bade her, with a smile, not be sulky, and went out promising to return in the afternoon and take her for a drive. First of all he betook himself to the City, and had a brief conference with a broker there. Then he returned westward in a leisurely manner, along Fleet Street, looking in at the shops, particularly the jewellers' and goldsmiths', with almost infantine pleasure. He was as fond of finery as a Turkish lady is of sweetmeats. His waistcoat was gorgeous with a thick gold chain of elaborate pattern; he wore an emerald pin in his cravat, and various rings—amongst them a diamond of considerable size—on his fat olive-coloured fingers. But not content with these adornments he went into a shop whose plate-glass window offered irresistible temptations, and bought a set of studs—black enamel and rubies and a spark or two of brilliants; things that could be descried a good way off, and glittered profusely. He did think of taking a

locket nearly the size of an ice-plate to C^Enone. But he refrained. She would probably decline to wear it. C^Enone's asceticism was a matter of real vexation to Spiridion Balasso. He would have delighted in a showy, dashing, gaudily-dressed daughter, able to display his fortune to advantage, and thoroughly to enjoy it. He was able to perceive that C^Enone had the air of a lady, and that she was by no means contemptible intellectually. He himself, although vulgar and uneducated, was not a fool; and he quickly became aware that if it were possible for him to attain to a much loftier rung of the social ladder than he was ever likely to reach, he need never be ashamed of his daughter's manners. But not being ashamed was very tame comfort. He would have liked to be able to brag of her, as he did of his wine and his jewels. "Dash it all, I wish she had a little more bounce!" said Mr. Balasso to himself, as he walked towards the Strand with his new studs in his pocket.

Finding himself so near it, he turned down into Howard Buildings with the intention of trying to see old Czernovic, but on the threshold of Mr. Quickit's house he met Flagge, who was just coming out. The two men

shook hands. They had met once or twice, and Balasso had been good-natured and pleasant with the medium. Balasso was habitually good-natured and pleasant; and if there did lurk a claw in the velvet sheath it must be owned that it was scarcely ever put out except in self-defence. Flagge, for his part, almost hated Balasso; but he eagerly accepted any friendly advances from him. Balasso was the way that led to C^Enونe; and it must have been a hard road Flagge would not have traversed to reach her.

"Can you happen to tell me if Papa Czernovic is in the house?" asked Balasso.

"Why, no; he ain't in. I've just seen Sacha, and he told me the Papa was gone down to the music-store. I guess you'd find him there if you want him."

"Oh, no, I don't want him particularly."

"Miss Nony pretty well?"

"C^Enونe is well enough, but a little cross-grained this morning. Girls are not easy cattle to drive, Dr. Flagge."

"I'm glad she's well enough," returned Flagge, drily. "'Tain't allus so. Latterly she seemed to me to be very frail and weak;—kinder fading, like a sick flower."

"Oh,—I don't know. She's a mi

creature, you know, and looks punier than ever amongst all these blooming English girls. I dare say she's stronger than she looks. These skinny, wiry people often are."

"Well, she might be a sight stronger than she looks, and yet not much to brag of that way. But what's wrong with her, that you say she's cross-grained?"

"By-the-bye," said Balasso, abruptly, "you know Lady Lowry, don't you?"

"Lady Lowry? Well, I reckon I am acquainted with her ladyship; yes, sir."

"You used to go there when my daughter was staying there on a visit? To be sure! I—— Are you walking?"

"Well, I had concluded to go to a luncheon-bar in Fleet Street, and have a snack."

"Will you lunch with me? Do! I'm going to an Italian place that I know of, where you get a very fair feed. Come along, I shall be delighted."

Flagge making no difficulty, Balasso hailed a cab, which soon deposited them at their destination. Balasso ordered a copious repast, taking care to impress on Flagge that he was ordering the most expensive viands which the house afforded. "Have you got any champagne fit to drink?" he said to the waiter,

speaking in Italian. "Bring us the best you have." Then he translated the command for Flagge's benefit, adding jocosely, "I don't go in for the cheap and nasty. Never did. I can do without things as well as another. But what I do have, I like to be of the best."

"Well, sir, I expect that's a sentiment pretty universally implanted in human natur'. I lived out West at one time among the untrammelled denizens of the rolling prairies, and I observed the Appanawchees 'ud do without whatever they couldn't get, and take the best when they could."

"Ha! it does your friends the Appanawchees credit, whoever they may be," returned Balasso, good-humouredly, as he fixed his napkin to his button-hole.

"Well, it's a kind of a providential adjustment of things, I opine. The only trouble is the 'doing without' part of it. Taking the best when you can get it don't come so hard."

"I wanted to ask you, Dr. Flagge," said Balasso, after they had eaten and drunk, and were arrived at the tobacco stage of the banquet, "what sort of a person this Lady Lowry really is—in confidence, you know." Then, seeing at once a look of hesitation and mistrust come over the man's face, he

added, "I'll tell you first why I want to know, and you will understand the position at once."

Flagge did not give Balasso credit for as much keenness of perception as he really possessed. The American had a certain dry contempt for the intelligence of this fat, boastful, vulgar, chuckling, Levant trader. But Balasso's sleek, rotund person, and jovial manners, were misleading if taken to symbolise the quality of his mind. In a few words he explained to Flagge what he wanted, and that he thought Lady Lowry might be useful to him. He spoke with perfect frankness, seeing no sort of advantage which was likely to accrue to him from doing otherwise. He had no hypocrisy as to his aims, nor as to his idea of the best method of reaching them. "I've got money," said he, "but not enough to do without a little patronage. If I had as many millions as I have thousands I shouldn't want anybody's help. But in London it takes a sight more cash than I have, to astonish the natives. Now you are a 'cute fellow, and you're a good deal behind the scenes: don't you think this Lady Lowry would be a useful acquaintance? None has a prejudice against her, but I don't suppose that counts for much."

"Lady Lowry is—well, she ain't exactly a seraph, Mr. Balasso."

"Not a seraph? Well no, I suppose not! A seraph would hardly answer my purpose of getting into Society, I should think." And Balasso chuckled, and stroked his black moustache, and showed his white square teeth.

"Well, I don't know but what a seraph *might* feel pretty badly in what's called Society. A seraph might sniff the brimstone too strong under the Bond Street perfumery. Sometimes I get a whif of it myself, so everlasting powerful that I'm a'most dumb-founded. But—not being a seraph—it don't asphyxiate *me*."

"Ha, ha, ha! No fear, I should say! Nor it wouldn't asphyxiate *Oenone*."

"Why, the cases are different, though, Mr. Balasso. Brimstone ain't her nat'r al element, anyway."

"Is there a special flavour of brimstone about Lady Lowry? Is that what you mean?"

"Well, sir, I ain't prepared to make that statement categorically; no, sir. The whole atmosphere of the house ain't heavenly. I don't mind saying that much."

"My chief reason for wanting to get a few introductions is to make *Oenone* a place in

the world. For myself, as you may easily understand, I can find amusement enough outside of Mayfair."

"And Miss Nony ain't grateful?"

"She don't understand. She's as ignorant in some things as a Red Indian. However, of course, she'll have to do what I tell her."

"Is she so *very* unwilling to go to Lady Lowry?" asked Flagge, anxiously. The idea of OEnone's being coerced into doing what she did not like, affected him a great deal more painfully than a far worse misfortune, happening to any one else, could have done.

"Oh, I dare say it's only one of her fads. She'll get over it. That little daughter of mine has her head full of all kinds of high-flown notions. What, now, should you say would be the best way of getting round Lady Lowry? Every one has his likes and dislikes, and I'm willing to humour her if she can and will do what I want."

Flagge rapidly turned the subject over in his mind. On the one hand, he was most unwilling to assist any proceeding which was distasteful to OEnone, but to this consideration he had to oppose the following ones: it was probable, nay, almost certain, that let

him say what he would, Balasso would call on Lady Lowry at least once. If my lady were rude and ungracious, well, the thing would die a natural death. But if, as Flagge thought more likely, my lady should think it worth while to be civil in the hope of profiting by C^Enone's clairvoyant powers, which she firmly believed in, then it would clearly be best that he should not have offended Balasso; and aroused Lady Lowry's suspicions, by endeavouring to keep them apart. If C^Enone were to be forced into contact with the Lowrys, he (Flagge) would at least be at hand to use his influence on her behalf, and to spare her annoyance as far as possible. Balasso, placidly finishing his cigar, had not watched Flagge's downcast eyelids, and hollow temples fringed with long straggling locks, above half a minute, when the latter looked up again, and said, "Well now, I guess I can fix it for you," and proceeded to say that he would take an early opportunity of mentioning Mr. Balasso to her ladyship, and of speaking of him in such terms as would dispose her to receive the father and daughter with all civility. "I know what 'll persuade her and what won't," said Flagge, "and I've pretty considerable of an influence over her."

"Spirits, and all that, eh?" said Balasso with a wink and a chuckle.

Flagge replied with perfect gravity. "Ain't a-going to discuss spiritism with you, Mr. Balasso, but I may as well say that if you suppose it to be all a humbug——"

"Oh, I didn't say 'humbug,' you know."

"No, you did not, sir. That's a fact. But I say it 'cos you meant it. And I'm a deal too well used to that to be riled. But you and a good many other 'cute people are wrong about spiritism. We're a dreadful smart generation, but I dunno as we've quite pricked right through creation, like a child with a gas ball, and found what's inside of it yet!"

"The child finds nothing inside but emptiness, Dr. Flagge!" returned Balasso, with a shrug of superiority.

"Well, I reckon that's because he's too ignorant to understand as a vapour that he can't feel between his finger and thumb *isn't* emptiness. However, as I was saying, I understand Lady Lowry. And although I may not be a titled member of the British aristocracy, you'll find that my good word ain't without its value in certain fashionable quarters. No, sir."

"Lord bless you! I can believe that fast enough! A man hasn't lived such a life as mine without finding out what queer strings the very smartest puppets are pulled by. You'll excuse the comparison, Dr. Flagge, ha, ha, ha! But you know the world, and so do I."

"Why, I don't see as there's anything to excuse, sir. I'd sooner be a queer string than a smart puppet, if there *is* to be pulling of wires."

"Right you are, Dr. Flagge!" exclaimed Balasso, with unfeigned sympathy.

"There's an Honourable lady friend of mine too,—Honourable Alexandrina Wigmore;—she belongs to very high connections. I should think she might help Miss Nony. She's not A 1, you understand, owing to her and her husband not having a dollar to bless themselves with, more 'n what just feeds and clothes them, and keeps 'em afloat on the top of a big sea of debt. But she might be useful. I'll see what I can do."

Balasso thanked him, and they shook hands and parted, Flagge starting at once to go to Green Street, as he said, and Balasso returning to his hotel.

"This way I shall keep some hold of Balasso, anyhow, and Nony won't slip out of my sight altogether," reflected Flagge as he walked along towards Green Street.

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT the same time that Dr. Flagge and Mr. Spiridion Balasso were lunching together, Lady Lowry was having an interview with Percy Wigmore. The interview took place in the library, instead of in my lady's boudoir. The latter cosy apartment had no fire in it, and all the furniture was muffled up in brown holland, and it looked thoroughly chilly and unattractive. The members of the Lowry household seemed to be stirred from the state of lethargic quietude which had recently pervaded them. The servants were more alert than usual ; there was a sound of movement and running up and down stairs in the house ; and as the door was opened to admit Wigmore, he caught a glimpse of a figure in shirt sleeves flitting across the hall, which figure was no other than the ducal Lobley himself.

Wigmore was aware that this unusual bustle portended the speedy departure of the family for Elcaster. In his quality of con-

fidential friend he had been permitted to discuss the projected journey with my lady, and had even in some measure contributed to its being finally decided on, in the following manner. He chanced to mention one day that his wife had received a letter from Lady Elcaster. Upon this Sarah, at once proceeding to catechise him with her accustomed persistency and directness, elicited from him several interesting facts.

First, it appeared that Lady Elcaster was not only an acquaintance, but a connection of Mrs. Wigmore, the Marchioness of Dull-drum being aunt to the latter lady, and cousin to the former. ("Dear me," said Sarah parenthetically, "I wonder how I came to miss that in the Peerage!") Secondly, Sarah learned for the first time that the Elcasters, mother and son, were now staying at their residence near Clevenal, a spot seldom honoured by my lord's presence for long together, and scarcely ever by his mother's, who was understood to dislike it, as being dull. ("That would not be the case," observed Sarah in another parenthesis, "if Lowry Place was inhabited by a family of distinction who understood how to keep up their position, instead of by a single woman.

Of course a single woman—though certainly she is not very young, as far as *that* goes—cannot have the same weight in society, nor entertain company like a married lady.”) Thirdly, it came out that Lady Elcaster had hinted at her intention of inviting the Wigmores to spend a week at Elcaster House, but that he (Percy) “didn’t quite see it.” “You wouldn’t catch Lady Elcaster invitin’ me and Alexandrina if she could get anybody else,” said the ingenuous Percy.

“La! Why?” demanded my lady in a rather sudden and peremptory fashion. The disagreeable question presented itself to her mind whether, since the Wigmores were not considered desirable guests by Lady Elcaster, they might not be ineligible acquaintances for herself.

“Oh, well, you see the fact is there was no end of a row amongst ‘em all some little time ago—reg’lar shindy.”

“Amongst who?”

“Oh, Lady Elcaster and old Lady Dulldrum and Alexandrina. They were all at it hammer and tongs.”

“What about?”

“Oh, well—it wasn’t about anything in particular. There was a lot of gossip and

chatter carried backwards and forwards, and they're none of 'em very sweet-tempered, and they got worked up into tantrums, and gave it each other so hot that—it made a coolness, don't you know? Fact is, I believe," added Wigmore, beginning again with a jerk; for he perceived that Lady Lowry still held him with her glittering eye, and that she would not be appeased without further particulars; fact is, old Lady Dulldrum, who is really a—a reg'lar old cat, I give you my word she is—told Lady Elcaster about Alexandrina's wanting to borrow a little money of her—the dowager's as rich as the Bank of England, and Alexandrina's her own neice, you know, so it wasn't very surprisin'—and the Elcaster said something nasty; so then Alexandrina thought two could play at that game, and she said something nasty. I should back Alexandrina myself if it came to a scrimmage of that sort; and I believe she had the best of it. So there it was, don't you know?"

"What was it Mrs. Wigmore said to get the best of it?" demanded my lady, doggedly. She found it difficult to understand how a person who wanted to borrow money could have achieved any triumph over a person who did not want to borrow money.

"Oh, dash it, I can't remember it all," said Wigmore desperately. "I believe Alexandrina told her aunt to tell the Elcaster that if her husband's father had been a brewer instead of a peer of the realm, she shouldn't have been obliged to trouble her, or something like that."

"Whose husband? And who wouldn't have troubled who?"

Percy gave a muffled groan. But there must have been some extremely strong and subtle charm in the butterfly gallantry which the airy and youthful-hearted little gentleman indulged in with my lady, for not even under the *peine forte et dure* of her cross-examination did it occur to him that he might have passed a less disagreeable half-hour by going to drive with his wife, as she had that morning suggested he should do. It was a new illustration of the homely saying that "Vanity suffers no pain;" for, save to gratify that master passion, stout, middle-aged Percival Wigmore would neither have subjected himself to the stolid selfishness of Lady Lowry, nor endured the pressure of his newest and tightest suit of clothes. However, he made a valiant struggle to explain his meaning—always one of the most difficult tasks to our

buoyant friend—and at length managed to get it conveyed into Lady Lowry's brain that the father of the first Earl of Elcaster had been a brewer of enormous wealth, and that the haughty Countess was well known to have jilted a poor man of her own rank in order to marry the brewer's son. This much having been made clear to her, my lady went on again :

“ Why can't Lady Elcaster get anybody else to go and stay with her ? ”

“ Oh, well, I s'pose she could get *somebody*, you know, only—their place is awfully dull, and there's no shootin' to speak of, and Elcaster don't get on with people somehow;—at least, not with the sort of people his mother could have to stay in the house, don't you know? And almost everybody's engaged just now, and Elcaster ain't on comfortable terms with the Countess's family, and she won't hear of his side of the house, and now he's got nothing to amuse him, and a lot of doctors potterin' about, dockin' him of his brandy and that, he must be awfully disagreeable, as sulky as a bear with a sore head—and so Lady Elcaster has asked me and Alexandrina down, don't you know? ”

“ And shan't you go? ”

"Well, I don't care particularly about goin'. Elcaster ain't the sort of fellah I like. Oh, I get on with him pretty well. I can get on with anybody, almost. But he and the old lady fight like cat and dog sometimes, and I hate that sort of thing. If you can't make things go smooth with people, you'd better cut it short at once, you know. At least that's my feelin'."

Lady Lowry was paying very little attention to Percy's statement of his feeling. On the contrary, she was reflecting that it would suit her extremely well that the Wigmores should be at Clevenal during her own visit to those parts. And she presently said, "Oh, I think you had better go. Doesn't Mrs. Wigmore like it?"

"Alexandrina's inclined to accept," admitted Percy, rather reluctantly. "She says it's so stoopid goin' on quarrellin' with people when they want to come round."

"So it is! At least with people like the Elcasters. You never know when they may be useful."

"La bless you! Elcaster wouldn't lend me fifty pounds to save me from starvin'! Oh, he's a reg'lar screw in some things, although he can make his money spin fast enough for anything he likes himself."

But it was not precisely the sort of usefulness that consists in lending fifty pounds of which my lady was thinking. So she observed once more, "Oh I think you'd better go. It would be very nice for you and Mrs. Wigmore to be there whilst we're at Elcaster."

"Well, your bein' so near would make it jollier, certainly; much jollier. Have you made up your mind to go down to Elcaster?"

"Quite," replied my lady. And, indeed, she had made it up within the last five minutes.

All this had taken place about a week before the interview between Wigmore and my lady mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. And during the interval everything had been satisfactorily arranged between Mrs. Wigmore and Lady Lowry, who had decided to take their respective lords and masters to Elcaster, with the most undoubting confidence in their power to have their own way in the matter.

In explaining the reasons which might be supposed to have induced Lady Elcaster to invite his wife and himself to visit her, Percy had omitted to mention one very principal one. It was true that my lord her son *was* very cross, ill-tempered, and unmanageable; and that it was difficult for various reasons for the Countess to secure guests who might be trusted

not to set his smouldering irritability in a flame, and who should be at the same time such persons as she could see at her own table without loss of dignity. But other waifs and strays might have been found for the seeking—"unattached" members of society, willing to make themselves agreeable for a consideration, and no questions asked. But Lady Elcaster had heard from the Dowager of Dulldrum a wonderful version of Alexandrina's wonderful stories of Dr. Flagge and the spirits, and the Lowrys and the missing will; and Lady Elcaster was dying of curiosity to know more. Since the notion had entered her head of having Miss Lowry for her daughter-in-law, she naturally took more interest in all that concerned Lowry Place than she ever had done before. This affair of the will might make a difference in her ladyship's views. To be sure she knew Alexandrina to have a very unscrupulous tongue on occasions. And besides, all the world knew that an ill-natured story would lose none of its ill-nature if Lady Dulldrum had the telling of it. The best plan would be to hear Alexandrina's account *viva voce*. And as to the impertinent speeches Alexandrina was reported to have made, some little time ago, why Lady Elcaster

wanted Mrs. Wigmore, and was not going to allow any small tittle-tattle about so insignificant a personage as Alexandrina to stand in the way of a gratification desired by so great a lady as herself. So she had written, inviting the Wigmores to Elcaster House, and allowing her reason for doing so to be very plainly seen. Lady Elcaster prided herself on never being afraid to say what she meant to every one; which, inasmuch as nine times out of ten she meant something bitter and insolent, had the effect of making her ladyship's society not so entirely charming as might have been wished.

However, the fair Alexandrina was very well able to take care of herself. "I shall go," she said to Percy. "Of course I understand all about it, and she knows that I do. But it's quite proper that we should be seen at Elcaster House now and then, amongst our own connections, and I know it 'll spite Aunt Jane frightfully."

Aunt Jane was the Marchioness Dowager of Dulldrum.

"Well," said the Honourable Percival, when he had paid his first salutations to the fair lady of the mansion, in Green Street, "so you're all in the midst of preparations to start, I see. Your boudoir has its hair

done up in curl-papers, eh ? It always makes me think of curl-papers when I see a room done up in those kind of pinafore things. Well, this ain't a bad box of Lowry's, though. I never was here before. Doosid snug place he has here, all to himself ! ”

“ Sir Cosmo requires a room where he can be quite undisturbed, for his studies. He reads an immense deal. Latterly, he has scarcely done anything else, I think.”

“ Smokes, too, a little, don't he ? ” rejoined Wigmore, sniffing the pronounced odour of tobacco which hung about the apartment.

“ Sir Cosmo is not looking well,” said my lady, with much gravity.

“ Ain't he ? I haven't noticed——I mean I don't see him very often. The Junior Georgic is such a stoopid club. Stoopidest club in London, as I often say.”

“ No ; Sir Cosmo is looking very far from well. I should have thought it could scarcely have escaped any one's observation, Mr. Wigmore.”

“ Oh, la ! so bad as that, eh ? Oh ! well—when you never set eyes on a man from one week's end to the other, you—you can't notice how he looks, don't you know ? What is it ? Liver ? ”

“Liver, Mr. Wigmore!”

“Well, some men do have it, you know, specially men that have been in the army. A great-uncle of my own by my mother’s side was forty years in India—general officer—awfully peppery old card—and with him it was nothing in the world but liver, nothing else in the world!”

“*What* was nothing but liver, Mr. Wigmore?” asked my lady with considerable asperity. “I really don’t know what you are talking of, but I do know that Sir Cosmo’s health is far from satisfactory, and I can assure you that this wretched business, and the very strange and unfeeling behaviour of his sister, is preying on his mind very seriously.”

“No!” said Wigmore, pursing up his mouth into an expression of as much sympathy as he could muster. But the little man had no turn for hypocrisy—even of the proper and social sort, and he did not do it well. “But what’s Miss Lowry to do if the will can’t be found, you know? I think that’s the way for Lowry to look at it.”

“You think that’s the way for Sir Cosmo to look at it?” re-echoed Sarah, now thoroughly angry, with her cheeks aflame, and her round

eyes very bright and blue, "Well, then, I must say that you do not show that sympathy and friendship which I expected from you, Mr. Wigmore."

This was a point on which she and Percy had differed before. Not even his gallant devotion to my lady's attractions could avail to make Wigmore join for a moment in her attacks on Miss Lowry, whether overt or covert. "They're carryin' the thing too far, you know," he had said to his wife. "The spirits are all very well in moderation. But when it comes to makin' hints, and even right-down accusations, against a most excellent and virtuous young lady on the authority of a fellah like Flagge—no, hang it all, Alexandrina! I can't stand that!"

So on the present occasion he staunchly refused to blame Miss Lowry, although, as he had thoroughly learned by this time, to do so would have been the most acceptable demonstration of "friendship and sympathy" he could have made to her sister-in-law. This obstinacy on the part of Percy might have led to an unpleasant scene but for the opportune arrival of Dr. Flagge, who was ushered into the library without any preliminary announcement.

"Oh! please to sit down, Dr. Flagge," said

my lady, as soon as she saw him. Then she called back the servant who had let Flagge in, and told him to admit no visitors whatever. "I am extremely occupied at this moment," said my lady.

"Well, p'raps you'd rather have me come some other time," said Flagge, coolly. "It don't matter to me. What I've got to say can wait, far's I'm concerned."

"No; I should prefer you not to go away, Dr. Flagge."

"Well, I'll say good mornin', Lady Lowry," said Wigmore, getting up from his chair.

"Good morning."

"Look here, don't you want me to tell that fellah that sends the flowers something or other?"

"Oh, yes; I've written it down here. But it would be better to see him. No more after Saturday. Make him understand." My lady's fit of indignation by no means prevented her from making use of the object of it.

"All right." Then bending down to take my lady's plump, be-ringed fingers in his, the gallant Percy murmured, "I say, don't be hard on a fellah!"

My lady breathed hard once or twice through her nostrils, but said nothing.

"And take care of yourself. You seem to have to think of everthing and everybody."

"I have, indeed," returned my lady, somewhat mollified. "But I understand the duties of my position. And I shall perform them, whether I am appreciated or not."

"Oh, but you are appreciated! There's one person who appreciates you, Lady Lowry. Do tell me if there's anything else I can do for you. It'll be a real pleasure, don't you know?"

"N—no; I don't think I want you to do anything for me just now, except seeing the flower-man. If I did think of anything I wanted, I should tell you." This was indubitably true.

"What a jolly rose-bud that is!" said Wigmore, lingering, hat in hand, and looking at a small vase of flowers near Sarah's elbow.
"May I have it?"

"If you like," returned my lady, stolidly.
"I can't get it out without upsetting all the others. Won't you manage it for me?"

"How ridiculous you are!" said my lady with her little guttural laugh. "There! I think you might have got it for yourself, though. Dr. Flagge will think you a dreadful goose."

And then Percy marched off in triumphant

good humour with the rose-bud in his button-hole. For all this quarrelling, and making up again, and general philandering,—which was all in truth very innocent, and never caused that sagacious matron his wife one moment's uneasiness,—gave Percy the delicious sensation of fancying himself young again, and was a true Fountain of Jouvence to his spirit.

As soon as Wigmore was gone, Dr. Flagge commenced his negotiation thus :

"Listen to me, fairest lady. Here's Nony Balasso come to be a big heiress. Ah, you may well look startled! But just let me tell you, now. Her father's come back from the East, from trading with the ancient races of the mysterious Orient—from whence, by-the-bye, a vast amount of spirit lore has come to us young and ardent, but inexperienced nations of the mighty West—and has realized a heap of dollars. Now, at fust sight, and to the eye of the material-minded sceptic or the scoffer, this combination might appear as if 'twas likely Miss Nony wouldn't be amenable to the magnetic influences any more;—at least, not in the manner most calc'lated to assist the researches we have in view. But under the guidance of a controlling spirit who was with me for several hours last evening,

one or two suggestions were written out in a bold and peculiar hand—(I dunno but it might be that Athenian ancestor of Miss Nony's, who used to come early in the winter, for there was something of a Greek character about his *e*'s)—and it seems to me, if you follow up those suggestions, you may be able to retain some kind of a hold on Miss Balasso. It may require you to exert some feminine tact, because of the manner in which you parted from Nony—or she parted from you. However, to a lady of your refined elegance and aristocratic culture, I should opine that there would be no difficulty in fixing it."

This long harangue had given my lady time to get firmly hold of the notion that Cenone's worldly circumstances were so far improved as to render her independent of any favours from the Lowry family. If her assistance were needed now by Lady Lowry, she must be treated with some civility. "Well," said Sarah, "but what's the good of saying all that? If Miss Balasso doesn't want me, she is not very likely to take any more notice of me. I'm sure she never showed any gratitude before, so we can't expect she should show it now!"

"Her father talked of coming to call on you,

lady. And if he should do so, you will receive him and Nony in a suitable manner?"

"Coming to call? Oh, but I am going to Elcaster on Monday. I have made up my mind to be *on the spot*, according to your suggestion."

"Well," said Flagge, after an instant's pause, "I don't see as that makes much difference. You'll not spend the rest of your life there, and when you come back will be time enough to begin that interchange of formalities and the ceremonial of social etiquette which is strange to a mind unrooted in conventionalism, and accustomed to the freedom of an Appanawchee, but which, nevertheless, has its uses in an ancient and artificial community like this."

The truth was that the sight of Wigmore had revived a half-formed idea in Flagge's mind that the Honourable Alexandrina might be as useful to the Balassos as Lady Lowry, and that with proper management she might be induced to "take them up," in the cant phrase she affected. Therefore he let the subject of OEnone and her father drop very coolly, and proceeded to discuss matters more nearly affecting his personal interests. And before he took his leave he had received from

my lady a cheque signed by Sir Cosmo, which she had that morning wrung from him with much difficulty, and at the cost of enduring an outburst of savage bitterness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE arrival of Sir Cosmo and Lady Lowry at the principal inn of Elcaster was, as a matter of course, known all over the little town within a few hours after it took place. Their movements, and all that could be learned of their sayings and doings, were watched and reported as keenly as if they had been royal personages. Such a thing was unprecedented as that a Lowry of Lowry should be living at the George Hotel, Elcaster, instead of in his own ancestral home. Sir Cosmo and his wife and Rosamond, attended by a maid and the faithful Lobleyn, had reached Elcaster on a certain Monday evening. My lady had declined to travel without Lobleyn, despite her husband's frowns and sneers. It was impossible to say, she observed, what sort of accommodation they might find in a third-rate little place like Elcaster. The George Hotel was not accustomed to receive personages of their

quality ; and a thousand arrangements might be necessary for my lady's comfort, which it was out of the question she should see to for herself, in her present delicate state. In vain had Sir Cosmo pointed out that her own maid, Moore, could do all that was needful, and demanded, if she could not, what the hussy was good for ? My lady replied to all objections by stolidly repeating, " I shall not go to a place where your family have been the principal people for generations without a manservant, Cosmo. Just think how it would look ! "

And as this last sentence contained the quintessence of her creed on all subjects, moral, social, and religious, further argument was thrown away.

On the Tuesday morning a closed carriage was ordered to convey Sir Cosmo and my lady to Lowry Place. " I wonder what Mary will say when she sees us ! " said my lady, as they were being driven along towards Clevenal. Sir Cosmo sniffed, and drew down the corners of his mouth, but made no answer in words.

" It will be a great surprise for her ! "

" A most agreeable surprise ! " said Cosmo, with an indescribable sneer.

" It ought not to be a *disagreeable* surprise,

Cosmo, but I'm afraid it will be. I wish I could think otherwise. It would be more creditable to Mary. I say nothing of what is due to me, but you are her own brother, Cosmo. That cannot be denied by the most partial of her friends!"

"I don't know why she should not hate the sight of us, myself," replied the baronet. "Green Street could scarcely have been a pleasant sojourn for a woman of Mary's breeding and education, even if we had done all we could to make ourselves pleasant to her. But the fact is we did—something like the reverse. And now we are pretty plainly insinuating that she used undue influence about my father's will. Upon my word if Miss Lowry of Lowry refused to receive us, I don't know that we should have much right to complain!"

"Oh, Cosmo, I do think it so unkind of you to talk like that! I know what you mean—"

"Well, yes; I should think my meaning was obvious to the meanest capacity," muttered her husband.

"Yes, Cosmo; I know what you mean when you talk about Mary's breeding and education. I cannot help my birth—although perhaps it is not so very mean as all that

comes to—and as to education—after three years with Mrs. Bolitho, I think I may venture to hold up my head on *that* score!"

"Tchah! You're a fool!"

My lady put her handkerchief to her eyes, but she did not keep it there long. Her tears had lost a good deal of their effect on her husband. The more completely Cosmo permitted the reins of government to slip into Sarah's hands, and the more he allowed himself to follow her lead in the matter which had brought them to Elcaster, the more he asserted his superiority and masterhood with his tongue. He was sneering, bitter, cruel, contemptuous in words. But every important action of their joint lives was bent and shaped by the plodding, persistent force of her stubborn will.

"That is not the opinion every one has of me, Cosmo," said my lady, removing her handkerchief from her eyes, and returning it to the interior of her muff. "Some persons consider me to possess rather remarkable abilities."

"If you mean Wigmore, he's a fool too."

Now, my lady had meant Wigmore. But she immediately answered with offended majesty, "No, Cosmo, I do not mean Mr.

Wigmore. He does think highly of me, but that may be because he is a friend. There are other people who don't consider me a fool. Mr. Quickit does not think me so, for one. He knows very well that it was owing to my judgment that he was called upon to bear witness to poor dear Sir Rupert's will. And there are others besides Mr. Quickit."

These words, stinging Sir Cosmo as they did with the recollection of his wife's victory and supremacy throughout the whole business of the missing will, threw him into so savage an ill-temper that Sarah deemed it prudent to refrain from exasperating him farther, and to bear his harsh sneers with what philosophy she could, reflecting that it would be better to arrive at Lowry Place with some semblance of harmony, and of acting together; and having a cunning notion that the sight of the house and property of which he had been defrauded might avail to turn his wrath against his sister better than any arguments of hers.

The door was opened to them by old James, who stared at them rather glumly, but without manifesting any special surprise. Neither did he use his privilege of long service to utter a word of greeting to Sir Cosmo, as he had done on the first return of the latter to Lowry Place.

James ushered the baronet and his wife into the drawing-room just as he might have done if they had been strangers come to pay a formal visit, and withdrew to announce their arrival to his mistress.

James's demeanour did not help to soothe Sir Cosmo's temper. Although it is probable that any manifestation of cordiality on the part of the old servant would have been snubbed and sneered at by Sir Cosmo as "the usual humbug of those people who expect to get something out of you if you are soft enough to be bamboozled," yet nevertheless this chill respect annoyed him; and he muttered something about James being a surly old fool who had been spoiled by over-indulgence.

"What can we expect, Cosmo?" asked Sarah, leaning back in an arm-chair beside the fire, and vigilantly casting her eyes all over the room to see if anything had been moved or changed in it since she was last there. "It's something new having a fire in the drawing-room at this hour of the day," she proceeded. "And what a lot of flowers! The greenhouse must have been finely stripped, I should think. I wonder why James did not show us into the library. Humph! Mary

has altered those hangings, I see ; and she's taken a lot of that old china out of the store-closet and stuck it up there. I know that blue and white sort is quite fashionable now, becaused I priced some in Hanway Street. But it was all kept under lock and key in the china closet when I first came here. I remember seeing it quite well when Mary showed me over the house."

Indeed, my lady could have made a pretty accurate inventory from memory of all the articles of value in Lowry Place. Whilst she made these observations her husband was pacing up and down the room, with his head sunk on his breast and his hands behind him. Sarah had certainly not exaggerated when she spoke of his looking ill. He was thin even to emaciation. His chest looked hollow; his hair, which six months ago had been slightly grizzled, was now quite grey; and his skin was the colour of old parchment. Any one seeing him now for the first time would have taken him to be at least fifty years old. To him, as he turned, having reached one end of the long drawing-room in his regular march, appeared Mary at the open window in the other end of the room, and the brother and sister stood for a moment

face to face, and divided by the whole length of the room. The change which had taken place in both since their meeting in that house last summer, and the contrast they presented to each other, was sufficiently marked and startling to impress itself on my lady, watching the two from her chair, with very unpleasant vividness. And, alas ! it must be confessed that that which sent the keener pang of mortified surprise to Sarah's heart was not the jaded look on her husband's face, but the bright, soft, transfiguring light of happiness upon Mary's. Sarah was not indifferent to her husband's well-being ; and, although neither her temperament nor his temper admitted of anything that could be called tenderness between them, yet she felt herself attached to Cosmo by a hundred ties, which made her pride, her interest, and her comfort depend very mainly on his. But pride and interest combined to exaggerate the dislike and distrust she had long ago conceived towards Mary ; and now to see her with that serene sweetness on her face, and that light of inward happiness in her eyes, struck Sarah like a personal injury, and it alarmed her. Mary looked like a woman who had nothing to fear from their presence.

Now, judging with Sarah's judgment, this serenity augured ill for her hopes.

Mary advanced, and so did Cosmo, and they met half-way, and shook hands. Mary then crossed the room to where Sarah was still seated, and was about to bend down to kiss her cheek, but she saw something in her sister-in-law's face which checked the impulse, and she merely offered her hand, which Sarah took with an attempt at languid dignity, not wholly successful.

"Did you get my letter, Cosmo?" were Mary's first words.

"No; I have had no letter from you lately."

"Ah! I feared it might cross you on the road. But I could not bear not to write."

"Why, did you know we were coming, then?" asked my lady, opening her eyes very wide.

"Yes; I knew it," returned Mary with a smile of amusement; for my lady's surprise and disappointment were so genuine that they caused her to drop the great lady air she had been trying to assume, with some suddenness.

"Dear me! I didn't know you were kept so well-informed of our movements, I'm sure. I suppose Miss Rosamond took care to let you know?"

"No ; not Rosamond. Cosmo, will you let me say a word to you in the study ? Sarah will excuse us for a few minutes."

"Well, upon my word, I do *not* think that very polite !" burst out Sarah, with a red, angry face. "I should have thought you could have had no secrets to tell Cosmo that I might not hear. I don't think it polite, nor well-bred, I assure you."

"I am sorry for that," answered Mary, quietly. "Still, I must beg Cosmo to allow me to speak with him alone for a few moments."

Mary had entered the room prepared to speak to her brother and his wife with full and friendly confidence. But an instant had sufficed to show her the spirit they had come in, and she did not choose to risk Sarah's comments on the news of her engagement, in Sarah's present mood. It was rather an instinct than a train of reasoning which made her perceive that she would meet with no sympathy from either of the two ; but at least with her brother she thought she should be safe from coarseness or offence.

Cosmo stood looking neither at his wife nor at his sister, but straight before him into the fire. Presently he said, with a sniff at

the end of each sentence, "I hope there are no mysteries. There's nothing more worrying than a mystery. Nor stupider. Everybody knows all about 'em. Or, if they don't know the particulars, they invent 'em. Better speak out, I should think."

The truth was that Cosmo was afraid to be alone with his sister. He shrank with the cowardice of a guilty conscience from meeting her clear eye, and replying to her clear speech, unsupported by Sarah's presence. He had not in his inmost heart ever thought evil of his sister, but he had heard evil attributed to her without defending her, he had acted and spoken as though he distrusted her, and even whilst he secretly resented and hated his wife's suspicions, he had allowed himself to appear to share them so far that it was impossible to draw back now, and profess his full confidence in Mary's goodness and honour. But, on the other hand, although he doubted not that she had come by it honestly, he grudged her the property left her by Sir Rupert, and would fain have possessed it himself. He had even come to deem it a cruel injury that he did not possess it. Altogether he was ill at ease in his sister's presence, and if he was obliged to confront

her, felt himself better able to do so when his wife was there too than under any other circumstances. Nor were these the only occasions in which Sarah had served at once as an excuse and a shield for him. When she made some speech peculiarly offensive to good taste, or good feeling, people said, "How that woman must make her husband wince! With all his faults, he *was* bred up a gentleman after all." But although it might be true that Sarah's speeches sometimes made him wince, yet he did not disdain to profit by them. He would fain have profited by them now, but my lady, having had time to recover from the first movement of temper, reflected that it would not do so to quarrel with Mary as to shut themselves out from Lowry Place before they had accomplished the object for which they had come—namely, a thorough, personal search through Sir Rupert's papers for the missing will. So she said, with an air of virtuous superiority, "I'm sure, Cosmo, I don't wish to be a cause of dissension between you and your sister. If you hesitate out of any feeling for me, you need not do so. I may have been hurt for the moment, but, of course, I don't really mean to say that Mary has not a right

to speak to you privately if she likes. I know my own position and my own duties, and I bear no malice to any one."

After this Cosmo felt he must follow Mary to the study, and hear what she had to say. Very briefly and directly she told him that she had promised to marry Major Maude.

Cosmo remained silent, with downcast eyes, for a little while. He had not seated himself, but was leaning with his shoulder against the mantelpiece, and his hands thrust into his pockets, in an attitude which was customary with him. After a few seconds he raised his eyes—they looked very haggard and sunken under the black bushy eyebrows—and said, "Well, is that all you have to say? This is not to be kept secret, is it?"

"No, Cosmo; my motive in asking to tell it you alone was to make it clearly understood, without offence to your wife, that I can receive no one in my house who does not choose to treat Vincent with respect and civility. I say this because I observed, before leaving London, that Sarah had taken a disagreeable tone in speaking of him. Why, I cannot tell,—nor, possibly, can she. All my wish was, and is, to be on terms of peace and good-will with you and your wife. Once

I hoped for something more,—for affection and confidence; but I have failed to win those from you, Cosmo."

The words and the tone touched him with a sharp pang of remorse; but he answered with a frown and a shrug, "I can't talk sentiment."

A flush dyed Mary's cheek for a moment; but she went on quietly, "Vincent is here now. He is ready to meet you in a friendly spirit, if you will let him."

"He's extremely kind."

"Had there been time, I should have asked you and Sarah to accept the hospitality of Lowry Place; but I was only told of your intention of coming to Elcaster the day before yesterday. However, it may still not be too late. If you will come and occupy your old quarters—I mean the rooms which you and Sarah had last August—you shall be welcome."

This offer was a tempting one; but Cosmo felt ashamed to accept it. On the one hand was the discomfort of living at the Elcaster inn, with the vision of a long bill at the end of the vista; but, on the other, there was something in the idea of accepting Mary's hospitality when they were cherishing such feelings and projects as had brought them

to that part of the world, which even Cosmo felt to be humiliating in its meanness. "Oh, I don't know," he muttered; "we didn't intend. You must speak to Sarah about it."

"Very well. And now, Cosmo, if you think you can undertake for your wife that there shall be no semblance of courtesy shown to him, I will ask Vincent to meet you both."

"I don't quite understand what it is you're afraid of," said Cosmo with a sneer.

"Rudeness," answered Mary curtly.

"Oh, well, Sarah is not a Grandison in petticoats; but I don't suppose she wants to be specially rude to Major Maude."

Mary accepted this as a promise that Sarah would not attack Maude, and, bowing her head, was about to leave the room, when, having just reached the door, she turned, and with a warm impulse went back to her brother and placed her hands on his shoulders. "Cosmo," she said, "if there has been any estrangement between us, it has not been my doing. I do so want to love you, if you will let me! Won't you say one kind word about Vincent? He was a staunch friend to you in the old times. And—and I am so happy now, Cosmo! Do you know, I have loved him all these years!"

Cosmo shifted his weight from one foot to the other, and drew his brows together, and twitched his nostrils. Then he said, "I don't know what I can say, Mary. You are your own mistress, of course. I don't know that there is any personal objection to Maude; but of course, if you ask my opinion, I must say that he is scarcely the kind of match for Miss Lowry of Lowry. I doubt whether he could tell you who his grandfather was."

And with that Sir Cosmo Lowry shuffled out of the room, and went to carry the news to my lady.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Of course we shall stay here, Cosmo," said my lady when her husband told her of Mary's invitation. "I'm afraid it may be too late to do any good;—it *may*, but at least we will not throw away a chance. Besides, it looks much better for us to be staying at Lowry."

On the subject of Mary's engagement, my lady did not waste many words. She was vexed, of course; for, if Mary did not give up to her brother the property she had inherited, the next best thing she could do would be to live and die an old maid, and provide for her brother's children. However, there was still the hope, if the spirits spoke truly, that Mary's marriage might turn out to be a very insignificant matter after all—at all events, to Lady Lowry!

"Mary has got it into her head that you are likely to bully Maude. If you mean to

stay here, you'd better not try that," said Sir Cosmo.

"I trust, Cosmo, that I know how to conduct myself as becomes my station. If poor Mary has any little feeling of soreness or jealousy about Major Maude's former very marked admiration for me, her mind will soon be set at rest when she sees us together."

"Yes; there's small doubt of that, I should say. *You!* Lord bless you, you foolish woman, he won't be conscious of your existence when Mary's by!" Then with sudden fierceness, "Devil take the snob! what does she see in him? A fellow of no birth at all! I don't know where he first found the cursed impudence to lift his eyes to Miss Lowry of Lowry! My father wouldn't stand it;—kicked him out as soon as he found what he was after. And there I go with my father. We agreed on that point, at all events."

Then the husband and wife went down to the library, where they had been told that Miss Lowry would await them.

Mary was there, and Major Maude was there, and Mrs. Flint was there, comfortably established with her wool-work—"Lolling back in an easy chair as if she lived there!" as my lady indignantly put it. Maude came

forward, and offered his hand, and said a few words very quietly, to which Sir Cosmo made a response half surly, half embarrassed, and my lady one wholly condescending, and marked by a certain cow-like dignity all her own.

Maude bore his new honours meekly enough, but to the massive simplicity of his ordinary manner there was added now a protecting attitude towards Mary, which was at once proud and tender. He had taken his place by her side with manful frankness, and very clearly meant to keep it against all comers. There was no trace in his demeanour of a consciousness that Mary was an heiress with a heavy purse and a long pedigree; nor the smallest symptom of an intention to be apologetic towards her family for any shortcomings in those respects on his own part. His extreme gentleness was so evidently the result of strength and kindness, that none but a fool would have been tempted to presume upon it. Sir Cosmo was not a fool; and on the whole he found that it was much easier to indulge in scornful sarcasms behind Major Maude's back, than to treat Major Maude disrespectfully to his face.

Between Mrs. Flint and my lady there ensued a greeting which might, perhaps, be

characterized as "offensive and defensive." But to Sir Cosmo, Mrs. Flint held out her hand, and spoke with some eagerness. "Good gracious, and is this really, really, Cosmo Lowry?" she said. "You know I didn't see you when I was in town. I haven't set eyes on you since—oh, ages ago! Not since your coming of age, I believe."

"Ah! And I'm so wonderfully improved since then, that you wouldn't have known me, I dare say," answered Cosmo drily.

"Oh yes, I should. Time changes us all, of course. But I should have known the Lowry brows and eyes anywhere."

Mrs. Flint, seeing no reason why she should be otherwise than familiar and unconstrained with her old acquaintance, Cosmo, began to chat with him about all sorts of incidents and people belonging to old times, and thus put Sir Cosmo more at his ease than he had yet been since he entered the house. He had neither memories of the past, nor intentions for the future, to make him shy or sullen with Mrs. Flint. She had no unfulfilled claim on his gratitude to trouble his conscience, and she had as exalted an estimate of the grandeur of his genealogy as could be desired even by a Lowry of Lowry who had married a farmer's

daughter. In a word, Mrs. Flint's presence and conversation had so happy an effect on Sir Cosmo that he was seen to smile without drawing down the corners of his mouth, and began to crack one or two dry, satiric jokes at the expense of sundry dead and gone Clevenal worthies who had flourished in his boyhood.

It thus devolved on Mary and Major Maude to entertain my lady. But the task was by no means an easy one. "You little expected to see me here, Major Maude," said Sarah, after a brief space.

"Well, to say the truth, I did expect to see you here, Lady Lowry," answered Maude, smiling a little, "having happened to learn that you were coming to Elcaster from Rosamond, and the fact is I believe your statement ought to be reversed; for you certainly did not expect to see me here."

"Oh, I am not so blind as all that, Major Maude, I assure you!" answered Sarah, with a little toss of her head, intended to be arch. "I saw what was going on long ago."

Neither Mary nor Vincent feeling inclined to discuss the question of my lady's acuteness and perspicacity, there followed another interval of silence. It seemed to oppress my

lady much less than it did the other two, for she was evidently revolving something in her mind, and giving all her attention to it without regard to the rest of the company. At length she said, "Cosmo has mentioned that you wish us to stay here for the few days we shall remain in these parts. Well, I frankly tell you that I shall much prefer being here to staying at that hotel in Elcaster. I make no secret of it, Mary."

"Why should you?"

"No; of course, it is only natural. I am not at all easy about your brother's health. Oh, well, if you ask me what distinct disease he has, I can't tell you. But people may be ailing without a disease that you can give a name to. Don't you notice how bad Cosmo looks?"

"He is very thin, and looks worn and tired," answered Mary; "but he does not complain of feeling ill, does he?"

"No; oh no; he does not complain. But as to thinness, he's a skeleton! I know what it is—harass, all harass. Harass tells on him, and he shows it. Now with me, although I feel things on my nerves to a degree no words can express, I don't betray it in my face. Dr. Possetter says he never did see such a com-

plexion as mine. Some people with one quarter of my anxieties would be lead-coloured by this time!"

"What is it that so harasses Cosmo?" asked Mary, innocently.

My lady pursed up her mouth, and shook her head. "I should have had a great many things to say to you if I had found you alone—or at least only with Major Maude," she added, mindful of her husband's hint. "I suppose we must look upon him as one of the family now. But, of course, before strangers, who are neither kith nor kin, nor even connections by marriage, one can't talk." And as she said this, my lady directed a look of elaborate significance at Mrs. Flint, who was chatting away with Sir Cosmo very unconcernedly.

"There will not be the least difficulty in your saying anything you may wish to say to me," replied Mary gravely.

There appeared to be no difficulty, in truth; for Sarah, drawing near to her sister-in-law, proceeded then and there to pour forth a statement of how the revelation of the missing will had preyed on Cosmo's mind ever since he had heard it; how Mr. Quickit's positive testimony that the document was still in exist-

ence when Sir Rupert left his house for the last time had taken hold of Cosmo and haunted him by night and by day; how this was all very natural, and even laudable, inasmuch as Sir Rupert, let what would have happened to estrange them, was yet Cosmo's own father, and the last will and testament of a parent had peculiarly sacred claims on the observance of his children; how, although no doubt there had been search amongst Sir Rupert's papers, still in a big house like Lowry Place things did get poked away in holes and corners, and wills were known (according to my lady) to have a mysterious and inexplicable affinity for holes and corners above all other species of written documents; and finally how, in the anxious condition of Cosmo's mind, and the unsatisfactory state of his bodily health, she (Sarah) had deemed it her duty to bring him to Lowry Place, and amicably arrange with his sister to have a thorough search made throughout the house under his own eyes. "And having made up my mind what my duty was," said my lady in conclusion, "I at once proceeded to do it. I have always made it a rule through life to do my duty, and I trust I shall never shrink from it."

"That is why you have come to Elcaster,

then?" said Mary. "I told my brother, and wrote to him, that I should be willing to let him look over all the papers in the house if he thought it worth while. But it will be in vain. Mr. Flint is convinced that my father left no other will than the one in his office."

"Oh, Mr. Flint——" my lady checked herself, and rising from her seat asked her husband if it were not time for them to be returning to Elcaster. They were to go back to the inn and make arrangements for coming to Lowry Place that same evening to dine and sleep. Mary begged that Rosamond might be allowed to come to her immediately. "I am longing to see the dear child," she said, "and she will be of no assistance to you, I suppose, during these few hours?" My lady declared that Rosamond's assistance was certainly not needed, inasmuch as there was more, not to mention that invaluable creature, Lobley, ready to do her ladyship's behests. So Major Maude undertook to drive the ponies into Elcaster and bring back Rosamond at once. And as this arrangement suited Sarah very well, for she was well pleased to get rid of her step-daughter whilst she discussed matters privately with Cosmo,

she gave a gracious consent to it, and Maude went off at once to the stables to give orders for the getting ready of the basket-phæton and the ponies.

"Good-bye, for the present," said Mrs. Flint to the baronet. And when they were in the carriage on their way back to Elcaster, the first thing Sarah said was, "What did that Mrs. Flint mean by saying 'Good-bye for the present ?'" Is *she* to be there this evening ? "

"Yes ; and her husband, too."

"To dinner ? "

"Well, I suppose when they're there, Mary will give them dinner. What do you mean ? "

"I consider it *shameful* ! "

"What's the matter now? Haven't you got your own way about getting into Lowry Place ? Ain't you contented ? You won't have to pay for the Flints' dinner."

"You know what I mean, Cosmo. Those Flints are evidently regularly hanging on to Mary, and poking themselves into the house as if they belonged to the family. I've no confidence in your Mr. Flint, I can tell you. He's had pretty pickings already, no doubt, out of the property. Mary believes in him blindly—or it suits her to seem to ! And

now they're flattering her up about Major Maude and her engagement, just to keep a hold on her. I dare say if she'd wanted to marry the baker or the butcher out of the village they'd have said it was all right."

Then Sir Cosmo made a very cruel rejoinder. "I don't quite think that, Sally," said he," for I believe Mrs. Flint considered it a terrible business, and mourned in sack-cloth and ashes when she heard of *my* marriage. And your father isn't a village butcher or baker, after all."

Major Maude and the ponies had made such good speed that he was ready to start with Rosamond on his way back to Clevenal by the time the "George" fly and its sober-paced steeds drew up at the door of the inn. Rosamond was in a glow of delight and excitement as she sprang into the phaeton.

"Rosamond!" exclaimed my lady, "you have not even changed your dress! Are you going in that morning frock? Where is Moore? Pray do not be so wild!"

"Oh, Aunt Mary won't mind my frock, and I can't help being wild—wild with joy! Go along, little ponies!" And the phaeton clattered along up the High Street at a brisk pace, and was soon lost to view.

My lady displayed so much haughty dissatisfaction with everything that had been done for her by the people at the "George Hotel," and Sir Cosmo snarled and scolded so mercilessly over every item of the bill presented to him by the head waiter, that that functionary, and the landlord, and the chamber-maid (who had been aggrieved by Miss Moore's second-hand arrogance), and, in a word, all the household of the inn, saw the departure of their high and mighty guests not only without regret, but with decided satisfaction. "The new baronet's as big a skinflint as the old one, by what I can see," said the old head waiter to his master, as they stood together at the door watching the fly laden with luggage make its second departure that day for Clevenal. The landlord shook his head contemptuously. "Sir Rupert was a close-fisted 'un, sure enough," said he, "but you knew where to have him. He didn't expect three penn'orth for twopence, and a low bow into the bargain. And if Sir Rupert warn't pleased, he'd rap out an oath, and let you know it straightforward. This 'un's all sneering and sniggering, and making fun of you in a crabby, cold-blooded kind of a way. What I call a bitter weed, *he* is."

Sir Cosmo was, of course, unconscious of

these comments ; but yet he had a sense on him, as he left the house, that he had not made a good figure there, and that the people were glad to be rid of him. He had always had a tendency to be fretful and suspicious as to what was said of him. And the fretfulness and suspicion had portentously increased of late. " Set of thieves, those fellows are ! " he muttered. " Never saw such a bill ! It would serve that man Packer right to publish it to the county."

" Now, Cosmo," said my lady, who kept all the vigour of her mind inflexibly bent on the one point, " here we are in the drive, and before we go into your sister's house I want to say a word. Believe or not believe what the spirits say, we've come down to Clevenal, and had all this trouble and expense in consequence of what they've told us, haven't we ? Well, now we are here, don't let there be any shilly-shally. We've come to look for your father's will, and I mean to look thoroughly. It's a—*a religious duty*, Cosmo ;—not to speak of the money we've advanced to Flagge ! And I hope you intend to back me up in doing my duty, for do it I shall, in spite of fifty thousand Flints ; and I know my own position, and despise people like them ; and as to mourning

over your marrying me, that low-minded old woman in her black wig should have cause to mourn it, if I had my way, and so I tell you, Cosmo. There!"

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was no time before dinner for any conversation between my lady and the other members of the party assembled at Lowry Place. She went at once to her dressing-room on her arrival, and only descended from it a minute or so before James announced dinner. The meal passed off very well, despite the incongruous elements of which the company was composed. Neither my lady's stolidity nor Sir Cosmo's sneers could avail to eclipse the gaiety of the others. Mr. and Mrs. Flint were delighted with Rosamond, in whom the latter kept discovering innumerable traits of her grandmother, Mary Hovenden. Rosy, for her part, was as joyous as a warm-hearted young creature could be, who from an atmosphere of gloom, depression, and coldness found herself transported into the midst of cheerfulness, affection, and cordial, smiling faces. As for the two lovers, they were so obviously and unaffectedly happy as to excite

my lady's displeasure. "I never saw anything like those two!" she observed to her husband, later. "And I don't think it's becoming."

"What is it has that shocked your fine taste, Sally?"

"Oh, it's no good talking like that, Cosmo. No one could help noticing it. Why, every time they look at each other their faces regularly beam again. I do think it looks so silly!"

However, my lady's silent and majestic disapprobation did not, as has been said, cast any shadow over the "beams" which she so much objected to. Possibly, indeed, her disapprobation passed unobserved; for Sarah's countenance was not very flexible or changeful, and even had the rest of the party been watching it closely, it is possible they might have failed to perceive anything more than the usual expression of stolidity in the round blue eyes and pulpy red mouth.

In the course of the evening, Percy Wigmore made his appearance in the drawing-room of Lowry Place. He and his wife had only arrived at Elcaster House the previous morning, and already he had left a card on Miss Lowry, and one for Major Maude at the inn in Clevenal, where the latter was now

staying. Mary had mentioned this when the ladies were alone in the drawing-room after dinner, and my lady had observed, in reply, that the Wigmores had been chiefly induced to accept Lady Elcaster's very pressing and often-repeated invitation by the fact that she (Sarah) intended to visit the neighbourhood about that time.

"I find that he and Rosy have struck up a great friendship since I left London," said Mary, smilingly, to my lady.

"I don't know about a great friendship, but I trust and hope that Rosamond has learned to appreciate Mr. Wigmore better than she did."

"Yes, I have," put in Rosamond, who had heard what was being said,—as, indeed, my lady intended she should. "I believe Mr. Wigmore is really kind-hearted; and he isn't a bit of a hypocrite. He may not be very clever, but he is ever so much better and nicer than his wife."

"Rosamond!" exclaimed my lady, reprovingly. Then turning to Mary, she said, "You have no idea how good Mrs. Wigmore was to Rosamond;—taking her out to drive, and to the Botanical Gardens, and behaving altogether in the kindest way. But Rosamond, I am sorry to say, is *not* of a grateful disposi-

tion. For, as I told her, even although we know that Mrs. Wigmore only took notice of her for my sake, still she ought to feel some sense of obligation. But I believe she positively dislikes Mrs. Wigmore."

"She doesn't speak the truth," pleaded Rosamond. "And you cannot like people when you find them out in being false!"

It was as this juncture that Percival came in, and deprived the company of my lady's comments on this dictum of her step-daughter.

"Good evenin', Miss Lowry," said he, advancing jauntily, but with a distinctly perceptible shade of hesitation. He was a little in awe of Mary, and not at all certain what sort of a reception she would accord to him. However, she speedily set him at his ease, and he greeted Mrs. Flint and Rosamond, and, last not least, my lady, with all his own youthfulness and gaiety of demeanour.

"I don't know whether a cigar has any temptation for you, Mr. Wigmore," said Mary, "but I believe there is something of the sort going on in the dining-room, where my brother is."

"Oh no, thank ye, Miss Lowry. I don't care much about smokin'. I'd rather stay here, if I may."

"The gentlemen will be here directly, I think."

"Oh, never mind them, thank ye. I much prefer ladies' society."

"You are a man of taste, Mr. Wigmore," said Mrs. Flint.

"Oh yes; men are so stoopid, sometimes, don't you know? At least, some men. I don't mean your brother, you know, of course, Miss Lowry. But there's Elcaster, now. He is awfully stoopid, unless you get him on bettin' and things of that sort. Now I know nothing on earth about racehorses, and I get flounderin' about out of my depth directly."

"How *are* the Elcasters?" demanded my lady, with a peculiar air of shutting out the others from this topic, and as if "the Elcasters" constituted a private conversational preserve for herself and Wigmore, on which no poaching could be permitted by the unauthorized.

"Oh, they're all right. At least, the Countess is all right. Elcaster's rather seedy, and awfully cross."

"I wonder they consented to spare you this evening!" said Sarah, archly. "What did they say to your running away?"

"Oh, I can't help what they say, you know.

I don't feel myself bound to play politeness with Elcaster. And as to the old lady, she don't want *me*, and she only wants Alexandrina to get all the gossip and scandal she can out of her. She always snubs me, in point of fact, because I won't kowtow to her. No, I told Alexandrina fairly before we came. I said, 'Now, look here, I'm goin' to please you, and you're goin' to please Lady Elcaster. But if I find it too disgustin' I shall slope, like a shot.' Why should I stand Elcaster's nonsense? That house is the deadly-liveliest den in the kingdom. What with the Countess's airs, and Elcaster growlin' at the servants, and the dinner, and the doctor, and everything, I really could not stand it. So I thought I'd just look in here, don't you know, for half an hour, if Miss Lowry won't turn me out."

Miss Lowry certainly was rather amused than offended by this ingenuous statement of the reasons which procured her the honour of Mr. Percival Wigmore's visit. Not so, my lady. She felt it to be very hard that such humiliating candour should have been heard by Mrs. Flint, whom she now looked on as her declared enemy. She had boasted about her dear aristocratic friends the Wigmores,

and of *their* dear aristocratic friends the Earl and Countess of Elcaster, and now came in that blundering Percy, and talked of them as if they had been the commonest of mortals. Nay, what was worse, he owned that Lady Elcaster was in the habit of snubbing him. It was altogether provoking and mortifying, and my lady turned sulky on the spot. In truth, her annoyance was superfluous, for Mrs. Flint had understood the whole situation perfectly well before Percy's indiscreet revelations, and had not the slightest idea of triumphing over Lady Lowry in consequence of them. But Sarah's mortifications were not yet at an end. To her surprise and disgust Mrs. Flint began conversing with Percy about "the Elcasters" in a most familiar strain; commenting on the old Countess's *hauteur*, and her son's character and pursuits, and on the disagreements between mother and son, and the mixture of meanness and extravagance in my lord's doings, as matters perfectly well known to her. It must be confessed that Mrs. Flint's judgment of Basil, Earl of Elcaster, had become much more clear-sighted since she had given up all idea of seeing Mary Lowry his Countess. Then presently it appeared that Lady Elcaster had been in the

habit of coming to see Mary frequently of late, and that she had spoken of her to Wigmore in the highest terms.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Flint to Maude, who had by this time come into the drawing-room with the other men, "it wasn't the Countess's fault if you were not sent about your business, sir!"

"What had I done to merit her ladyship's displeasure?" asked Maude, looking across with an amused smile at Mary. But Mary blushed and shook her head. "Nonsense, Vincent," she said, "Mrs. Flint is pleased to laugh at us."

Lady Lowry broke her sullen silence at this point, to inquire rather eagerly what it was that Lady Elcaster had said "against Major Maude."

"It would have done credit to her ladyship's powers of invention if she had said anything either for or against me," said Maude, "for I believe she was until yesterday quite unconscious of my existence."

"Oh, I don't mean that she hated you individually, Major Maude. But she had made up her mind that somebody would be a very nice daughter-in-law, and she didn't want you or any one else to carry off somebody from under her nose."

Lady Lowry was astounded, angry—and incredulous. Therefore, instead of letting the matter drop, as Mary evidently wished, she pressed question after question with so much coarseness and spite, that at length Mrs. Flint said plainly, “Now, it’s no use your shaking your head and looking so indignant, Mary. Your sister-in-law does not understand the matter at all, and will think Heaven knows what unless I undertake to speak to the point without hint or innuendo. What I meant by my little joke, Lady Lowry, was simply that the Countess of Elcaster showed an undisguised wish that her son should marry Miss Lowry——”

“Mrs. Flint!” exclaimed Mary.

“My dear, I don’t think there’s any harm in saying that! It is the fact! I believe Lady Elcaster wouldn’t deny it.”

“Oh no, upon my word, she wouldn’t,” said Wigmore, after his usual boyishly ingenuous fashion. “She almost said as much this evenin’ at dinner. She said Miss Lowry was—well, I won’t, then!” and Percy pulled himself up abruptly, in obedience to Mary’s grave protest, “Mr. Wigmore, I beg you will say no more.”

My lady sat dumb, with flaming cheeks.

Mary had refused to be a Countess, then? The thing was incredible. Cosmo, too, listened with feelings of almost equal bitterness, though from a different cause. Mary had had this chance—had had a coronet at her feet, and had kicked it away for the sake of a fellow like Vincent Maude. Mr. Flint, who read both their minds pretty keenly, changed the subject by a *coup de main*. “What’s the latest news from spirit-land, Mr. Wigmore?” said he. “I hear you are quite an adept, and the last time I spoke with Lady Elcaster she said something about wanting to investigate spiritism. Now, when people like Lady Elcaster talk about wanting to investigate, one has a pretty shrewd notion what that means. But,” looking round with a cool, clear eye, “I must be careful what I say in the present company. I understand your ladyship is a believer, eh?”

Her ladyship was still struggling with the idea so suddenly presented to her mind that Mary might have been a Countess, and wouldn’t; and as her ladyship’s intelligence, however solid, was certainly not mercurial, her ladyship stared helplessly at Mr. Flint, as if he had addressed her in an unknown tongue. Sir Cosmo was half inclined to resent Mr.

Flint's bold mention of the spirits as an impertinence under all the circumstances. But, inasmuch as he had openly pooh-pooh'd the spirit theory himself, he felt that there would be a certain absurdity in running a-muck on its behalf against Mr. Flint—not to mention that Mr. Flint was an enemy whom Sir Cosmo would rather attack in any imaginable manner than an open manner, tapon any possible subject. So there was a pause, which would have become embarrassing but for the buoyant and unquenchable Percy, who rushed gallantly into the breach. "I shall end by adoring that smiling little wax doll of a man," said Mrs. Flint to herself.

"Oh, look here," said Percy, "I can give you the very latest intelligence. Jove, it's quite a curious coincidence your sayin' that now, Mr. Flint! Fact is, I'm givin' up spiritism myself. I don't like goin' in for these things to the extent of—of——"

"Really believing in them?" suggested Mr. Flint, with grave politeness.

"Well, I mean—makin' 'em a noosance, don't you know? It makes all the difference how you take things. Now with the Dableys and old Banbury St. Cross, and all that sort of thing, there was no chance of gettin' into

a scrape, don't you know? But, by Jove, some people go in for it to such a degree that you may have a bear loose in no time—'specially in families. Because, of course, if there is a row it's sure to be your own people that pitch into you the hottest, don't you know?"

And with this, Percy smiled round on the assembled company, apparently quite undismayed by his own somewhat depressing theory of the laws that govern domestic relations.

With the exception of Lady Lowry, every one present winced more or less perceptibly at this unlucky speech. But Sarah was equal to herself and to the occasion. Drawing herself up with dignity, and opening her eyes to their fullest extent, she began a sort of monologue with these solemn words : " *I think* it's wicked to talk against the spirits."

There was nothing to be done but to listen in silence. Sir Cosmo, with a heavy frown on his face, and his shoulders hunched up to his ears, retreated behind a large book of engravings which lay on the centre table, and made as if he were absorbed in their contemplation. But to the others no such refuge was open, and they had to endure the cold douche of my lady's eloquence with what

fortitude they might. At length—apparently for no other reason than the general law which decrees that no sublunary thing shall go on for ever—Sarah's harangue came to an end. And then Mr. Flint, turning to Wigmore, said, “ Well, and what *is* your latest intelligence ? ”

The latest intelligence was, it appeared, that Lady Elcaster, excited by Mrs. Wigmore's account of the wonders of spiritism, had sent to London for Dr. Flagge the medium, and that he was expected to arrive at Elcaster House shortly.

“ Sent for him ! ” cried Mrs. Flint.

“ Invited him to stay at Clevenal for a few days, don't you know ? Of course, she'll pay him. And if she didn't, it would be worth Flagge's while to go to Lady Elcaster. She's quite bitten with the thing. I believe she fancied it might help to amuse Elcaster, but he don't seem to take to the notion. He says if the spirits will name the winner of the next Derby he'll believe in 'em. However, the old Countess is goin' to have Flagge. I shall keep out of it. I told Lady Elcaster so. I said, ‘ Look here, Lady Elcaster, I know something about the spirits, and I've seen a good deal of 'em, and they're all very well

up to a certain point; but when people go plungin' in over head and ears, and believin' all their gammon, don't you know, something disagreeable is safe to turn up—safe as the day,' and so it is."

Soon after this Percy took his leave, and Maude accompanied him. And then Mr. and Mrs. Flint went away, leaving the Lowry family together under their old roof-tree.

The next day my lady began her search in earnest, and on a methodical plan which she had already arranged in her own mind, and to which Mary made no objection. This plan was to take the house in horizontal sections, beginning at the garret, and working down to the basement story. To the remark that no documents of any consequence were ever deposited in the upper regions inhabited by the servants, and that all the papers and letters belonging to Sir Rupert would be certainly found distributed amongst three rooms: namely, his own bedchamber, the library, and the little study, on the ground floor, Lady Lowry replied that as to those latter places they had already been searched; that in order to do things thoroughly her plan was the best, and that if the search throughout the rest of the house proved unsuccessful,

they could but make one more, and final, attempt to find the missing will, by carefully sifting again all the papers which had already passed through Mary's and Mr. Flint's hands.

The mode of proceeding was as follows: my lady had a comfortable, well-cushioned easy chair, a footstool, and such warm wraps and shawls as she thought needful, carried into the room—attic, or store-room, or whatever it might be,—which she had decided to make the scene of the day's operations. There she installed herself as comfortably as circumstances would admit of, and set her aides-de-camp to work to bring her everything in the shape of a written paper which they could lay their hands on, and which she then examined for herself. The aides-de-camp varied occasionally with circumstances. Sometimes a lad would be told off from the stables or gardens to carry the basketful of dusty yellow old papers to my lady's armchair, and to mount on step-ladders to high shelves or presses, and overhaul their contents. Sometimes a housemaid was spared to lend a hand. But let these subalterns change as they might, Miss Moore was always present at her mistress's elbow; and although at first she found prying and searching through other

people's property an agreeable excitement enough, in the dulness of a quiet country house, yet she soon became tired, complained of the dust and the cold, and exhibited symptoms of sulkiness to her mistress, and of rebellion and contempt in the servants' hall.

Indeed, to persist in such a task as my lady had undertaken required considerable force of will, and energy of perseverance; for although Sarah underwent very little, if any, bodily fatigue, still neither for her was it in itself an agreeable manner of spending the morning to sit in the cold garret in the winter time, and turn over heaps of worm-eaten papers which sent forth clouds of dust at every touch, and a musty smell as of the dead and gone years which lay embalmed, mummy-like, within their yellow folds. And it was amazing to see what masses of papers were dragged forth from long-forgotten hiding-places. Why or how most of them had been preserved was a mystery. There were old copy-books, old account books, old diaries, and memoranda of all sorts; heaps of letters,—to look at the quantity one would have imagined that all the Lowrys for generations past had been in the habit of hoarding every scrap of writing that came into their hands!—bills, family receipts,

and inventories of the contents of china and linen closets. One long-disused attic, which served as a store-place for odds and ends of furniture laid up in ordinary, as it were, was a mine of these old and utterly valueless documents: valueless, that is to say, to my lady. Some quaint and picturesque chapters of family history, and obsolete manners and customs, might have been pieced together out of those yellow papers with their faded ink. But not on such trivial objects was our Sarah's forcible will bent.

It very soon became evident that the task she had set herself would be a long one, if she continued to pursue it with the same thoroughness to the end. But after three successive mornings of hard work her perseverance showed no signs of wearing out. Sir Cosmo had—at her urgent and even imperative request—come up to see her on the second morning, when she was about half-way through the contents of a great oaken press in the disused attic before mentioned. My lady's pink and white complexion was disfigured by smears of dust; dust was in her pretty brown hair, and her white plump fingers were certainly dirtier than they had ever been since the days of her infancy, when she had made mud pies

or grubbed holes in the rich clay soil of her father's farm.

"Good Lord, Sarah, what a state you're in!" exclaimed her husband, looking at her very much as if she really were a naughty child, who had dirtied its pinafore. "It can't be necessary for you to steep yourself in grime in this fashion."

"As to being necessary, Cosmo," returned my lady, "I don't know. Some people don't think it necessary to do their duty. I do. I consider it my duty to my husband and my husband's child—perhaps your son and heir, Cosmo—to look after their interests, however disagreeable it may be to myself."

Moore had been sent away to her luncheon, and the husband and wife were alone together.

"But it's all nonsense, you know, poking about here. It's totally out of the question that Sir Rupert should have left his last will and testament up here! I don't suppose he ever was in this room since he was a schoolboy."

"Never mind, Cosmo. I shall go on as I've begun. And then nobody can say afterwards that I didn't have a thorough routing out."

"But, good heavens, you'll be weeks about it, at this rate!"

"Never mind, Cosmo. It can't be helped if I am."

"H'm! I suppose you would consider it superfluous to inquire what Mary says to that?"

"She won't turn us out, I suppose."

However, acting on her husband's hint, my lady did say something in the course of the day to the effect that she feared she should not be able to complete her investigations as quickly as she had at first hoped, and the visit of herself and her family to Lowry Place threatened to be protracted to weeks instead of days. "But I dare say you agree with me, Mary," she said, "that it's better for the satisfaction of all parties to do the thing thoroughly whilst we are about it."

And so, day after day, Sarah sat and turned over piles of papers, whilst Sir Cosmo went over his estate, worried Mr. Stokes, and made himself detested by the majority of the tenants, who were all of the opinion of the landlord of the "George Inn," that the new baronet was "a bitter weed."

CHAPTER XVI.

SIR COSMO LOWRY and his wife had arrived at Lowry Place on the sixteenth of January ; it was now the middle of the first week in February, and they were still there, and nothing had come of Sarah's obstinate search. That is to say, at least, she had not found what she sought for ; but, in other directions, several things had come of her search. In the first place a great deal of gossip had come of it, and a wonderful number of false statements : from the simple misapprehension of the ignorant and inaccurate to the lie direct and malignant. There was not a dwelling in Clevenal where my lady's proceedings were not eagerly canvassed. They were an exhaustless topic of talk alike in the labourers' cottages and the drawing-rooms of Elcaster House.

Mrs. Flint declared seriously to her husband that she thought the woman was mad. " She

has a monomania on the subject of Sir Rupert's will, Samuel," said Mrs. Flint. "All that detestable spirit business has turned her brain. One has heard of such things happening before now. All I wonder at is that Miss Lowry should allow it to go on ; to think of having one's house ransacked in that way—and by that woman ! "

But Mr. Flint would not give in to the theory of monomania. And as to Miss Lowry, he thought she was behaving admirably.

" Well, but, Samuel, you don't suppose for one instant that Sir Rupert was likely to have hidden away his will amongst the disused rubbish in the garret ? "

" No, I can't say I suppose that."

" Of course not ! No one who knew Sir Rupert could entertain so preposterous an idea. No sane man or woman could believe it. Lady Lowry has been told by all sorts of people who did know him well that such a proceeding on his part was utterly incredible and out of the question, and yet she goes on day after day—it's a case of monomania. That dreadful man Dr. Flagge—and why doctor ? Only with people like that, if you begin with one 'why' you must go on with a hundred more—twists her round his finger ; makes her

believe what he likes. *How* Lady Elcaster can harbour such a wild-looking creature, with his hair all about his shoulders, and that jacket with silver buttons like a dancing dog——!” &c., &c., &c.

In truth, Dr. Flagge’s presence at Elcaster House had caused a sensation little inferior to that made by the story of Sir Rupert Lowry’s missing will. Had not the Lowrys been Clevenal folks from father to son for hundreds of years, it may be asserted that Dr. Flagge and the spirits would have carried away the palm. But nothing could be so interesting and important in Clevenal as the private affairs of Clevenal magnates. Dr. Flagge, after all, was an outlandish personage, who had appeared to “overcome them like a summer cloud,” and would in all likelihood disappear again in the same manner. As to his occult and magical wonders, public opinion amongst the villagers was greatly divided : some opining that Flagge performed tricks with balls and little red boxes such as they had seen at Elcaster fair ; others inclining to the belief that it was more like fortune-telling ; while some said that he showed ghosts on a white sheet in the dark by means of a magic-lantern. It had got about that there was

some connection between my lady's search for the will and "Dr. Flagge's spirits" as the Clevenal phrase had it, attributing to the eminent medium a sort of proprietorship in the troupe of disembodied ladies and gentlemen who were supposed to contribute to the amusement of the great people at Elcaster House.

To Mary Lowry and to Vincent Maude the neighbourhood of Dr. Flagge was the most disagreeable result of the whole matter; far more so than the presence and the active researches of Sarah. Maude honestly thought Flagge not only an unscrupulous, but a malicious fellow, and Mary was shocked and hurt at the idea of her father's name being used in the deceptions of this charlatan. Some account of what went on during the *séances* at Elcaster House reached her by one channel or another, and everything she heard of Dr. Flagge's spirit revelations served but to deepen her disgust for them and him. Almost immediately after his arrival at Elcaster House Sarah intimated that she wished to see and speak with him; and upon this Miss Lowry had quietly but firmly declared that she would on no pretext receive Dr. Flagge. This was a great blow to my lady, but Mary was inflex-

ible, and quite unmoved by representations that Flagge was admitted to the houses of the "aristocracy," and that it would "look so funny" if Miss Lowry openly set herself against a person patronized by the Countess of Elcaster. "Besides, I particularly want to speak to Dr. Flagge," said my lady, as if she thought that argument irresistible.

"I have no pretension to prevent your speaking with any one you think proper to receive. If Dr. Flagge comes here by your directions to see you, I will give orders that he shall be admitted to the drawing-room, where there will be no other person."

"But when can he come? All the morning I am occupied in the search. And I can assure you it is a fatiguing business, Mary! After luncheon I require a little rest. No one seems to consider that my strength requires to be kept up, particularly under present circumstances. The most convenient plan would be to have him here to dinner; or at all events in the evening, and then I could talk to him comfortably."

"I am sorry to disoblige you, Sarah, but I must positively refuse to admit that person among my guests."

"Really, Mary, you are dreadfully pre-

judiced. Any one would think to hear you that you knew nothing of the world."

"It is true that I know very little of Dr. Flagge's world ;—and the glimpse I have had of it does not tempt me to know more."

"Well, I declare I had no idea you could be so obstinate."

Mary shook her head laughingly. "There never was a Lowry yet, I believe, who had not a spice of obstinacy," said she.

My lady had to give up the attempt to get Dr. Flagge invited to Lowry Place.

But this check, by reminding her of Flagge's last interview with her in London, suggested to her mind another proposition, which she proceeded to make, undaunted by her failure about Flagge, and not permitting dignity or resentment to prevent her making an attempt in a different direction. She began at once, driving straight to her point.

"I think it would be kind of you, Mary, to ask that poor little CEnone Balasso down here for a few days to see Rosamond."

Mary was considerably surprised at this proposition. Her sister-in-law had never shown any particular kindness to CEnone. My lady went on : "I am told that Mr. Balasso is anxious to get the girl taken up by people of

good position. She has no mother, and it would be a charity to help her out of that dreadful set of people she was living amongst; and Mr. Balasso is very well off—extremely well off—almost what you may call a rich man, so that really it would not look at all queer to take notice of the girl. Indeed, I think it would be quite a proper thing to do. I should have invited her to Green Street, I assure you, if I had been going to stay in town."

"I did invite C^Enone to come here, thinking that change, and rest, and country air, even in the winter, might be good for her. But she refused to come. She seemed almost to shrink from coming in a strange way."

"Oh well, she always was strange. You musn't think anything of that. I dare say she's more agreeable in her manners now that she has better clothes, and all that."

Mary asked her niece, as soon as she found an opportunity of doing so, whether she had seen C^Enone recently, and whether she should like her to be invited to Lowry Place. To the first question Rosamond replied by relating the story of C^Enone's sudden departure from Green Street, and Lady Lowry's consequent wrath against her. To the second,

she answered that she loved Nona dearly, and should rejoice to see her again, although Nona had seemed to wish to divide herself utterly from all the family.

"Well, so it appeared to me, I confess," said Mary, more puzzled than ever as to the motive of her sister-in-law's sudden tenderness for CEnone Balasso. However, my lady returned to the charge gallantly, and made it a personal request that CEnone should be invited to Lowry Place.

"I am more than willing to have the poor child, if you think it would be of any help or comfort to her to come here, but—the truth is, that I scarcely know where to put her."

"Surely there must be space enough in this big house!"

"There is space, undoubtedly; but many rooms have been disused and dismantled for years."

"Well, I'll tell you what could be done. Rosamond's room is a very large one; just have another bed put into it, and the two girls will do beautifully together."

Mary could scarcely help laughing at the singular persistence of her sister-in-law. However, she was unwilling to refuse to invite CEnone, and consented to send her a note.

asking her to come to Lowry Place the following week. "I think you will find that ~~Enone~~ will refuse," said she, when she had finished her note, and enclosed within it a few lines from Rosamond.

"Oh, no! If she were such a fool, her father knows better. I am told Mr. Balasso is a person of very proper feeling, who wishes to get into a nice set. What a mercy for the girl that her father turns out to be such a sensible man! He might have been a creature like that dreadful old Russian. One might have expected anything, I'm sure, to hear Miss Balasso's queer talk."

When Vincent Maude was told of the invitation he was so manifestly dissatisfied that Mary could not help perceiving it. "Do you dislike my having ~~Enone~~ here?" she asked. "In truth, Vincent, it was chiefly the thought that you were interested in her, and would like me to be kind to her, which turned the scale."

"No, dearest!—dislike you to have poor Nona! Certainly not. And your sweet goodness to her would make me love you more than I do, if that were possible. But—What has put this into Lady Lowry's head? She used to treat Nona anything but affect-

ionately. There never was such a woman! Her single-mindedness in pursuing her own way, and her shamelessness in disregarding the feelings of every one else, are almost sublime."

My lady despatched a note to Mr. Balasso by the same post which carried Mary's invitation to his daughter. She was minded to have all the credit to be got by patronising poor Oenone; and at the same time she gave Mr. Balasso a hint that to neglect or decline this invitation would be equivalent to losing her countenance for his daughter next season. "Well," she said to Flagge, the next time she saw him, "I have invited Miss Balasso here. And I hope it will be of some use. I suppose there's no fear of her refusing to be mesmerised? I have no idea of her giving herself airs, even though she may be comfortably off. If she comes to a house like this, I shall expect her to show some gratitude. I wish that to be clearly understood."

Flagge looked at my lady almost with admiration. He had never conceived the idea that Miss Lowry might be induced to invite Oenone to visit her. Then a sudden misgiving crossed his mind. "Nony has the peculiarities of a highly sensitive organiza-

tion," said he. "I don't feel sure she'll accept."

"Sensitive fiddlesticks! Don't talk nonsense, Dr. Flagge. If she takes any of her rhodomontading whims—that's what you really mean by sensitive organization!—her father will exert his common sense, I should hope. I took care to write to him also."

"Lady, I admire your energy and grasp of mind!"

"Ah, I can assure you it's all needed. Day after day I go on looking and searching and rummaging about amongst masses of paper until I'm fit to faint. But up to the present time I haven't come upon one scrap referring to Sir Rupert's last will and testament. The spirits keep on telling you that it was not destroyed, do they?"

"They testify to that effect. Yes, madam. But—that ain't altogether same thing as saying it's in this house, you know, lady."

Sarah turned pale. "Why, good gracious, Dr. Flagge," she exclaimed, "you don't mean that after I've rummaged through this house as no one but a wife who was determined to do her duty by her husband's family could or would have rummaged, that I may have to begin the search all over again? And where?

Oh, it's too awful to think of!" And she clasped her hands with a despairing gesture that was quite genuine and unaffected.

"Well—I guess that if the document was not discovered in the course of your researches throughout the family mansion in which the deceased breathed his last—why,—you'd just have to give up," returned Flagge slowly.

It was the first word of discouragement—the first word, indeed, other than wholly encouraging—which she had heard from him on the subject, and it came upon her almost like a blow. But in an instant she rallied, and standing up said, "As long as I've breath in my body I won't give up until that will's found. The spirits have promised me that I shall find it. And—and you're not the only medium in the world! I've heard of a woman who can do wonderful things; read a letter put at the back of her head, and see what's going on a hundred miles off. Give up? Why, I do believe it would kill Sir Cosmo! He hasn't said much about it,—that is not Sir Cosmo's way,—but I know he has had scarcely anything but this missing will in his mind for months and months. It isn't of the least use for you to talk to me about giving up, Dr. Flagge, and so I tell you."

If Mrs. Flint could have seen and heard my lady at that moment, she would have been confirmed in her theory that Sarah was the victim of a monomania on the subject of her father-in-law's will.

Flagge, as he walked down the avenue and through Clevenal village, took a mental review of the situation. "After all," said he to himself, as he shrugged his shoulders and tossed the long hair aside from his forehead, "*that* game's pretty near played out, far's I'm concerned. Miss Lowry despises me; won't receive me into her house. I know all that very well, and I don't care a cent. about it. Only—if they do get Nony to come down here, I don't want to be banished from the sight of her. My poor little white lily! There's not one of 'em all understands her as I do. And as to caring for her—why I don't believe there's a human being on the face of the earth except poor Obadiah Flagge as would have a half an hour's heartache if she was to die to-morrow:—not even her father. And yet all these others can see her and be with her, and talk with her as much as they care to, whilst I have to scheme for a glimpse of her. It's an infernal foolish world,—and I dunno but I'm as big a fool as there is in it!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ENONE and her father came down to Elcaster at once, on the receipt of Miss Lowry's invitation. Balasso brought his daughter to Lowry Place himself, and made many acknowledgments to Miss Lowry for her kindness. He took care to make her understand that he did not intend to encroach on her hospitality, and that two days would be the limit of Enone's visit, inasmuch as he was about to take her abroad for the rest of the winter and the spring. She was not strong, and a few months in the South of Europe would set her up for the fatigues of the ensuing London season. They had, in fact, intended to start from Dover on that very day, but he was unwilling to deprive his little girl of the pleasure of this visit, and had therefore put off their departure for a few days. "I go back to town by the mail train to-night, Miss Lowry, and shall return to fetch my little girl

on Friday morning, if you will permit me," said Balasso as he took his leave.

Lady Lowry afterwards expressed her surprise that Mr. Balasso should think it worth while to run backwards and forwards between London and Elcaster, just for a couple of days. "He might have put up at the George. I've no doubt he would have done very comfortably there," said my lady; thereby conveying her sense of the difference between the sort of accommodation required for herself and Sir Cosmo, and that which would be good enough for Mr. Spiridion Balasso.

But Mary understood that Balasso had gone away from Elcaster in order to avoid any appearance of wishing to thrust himself on the Lowry family. He knew that it was one thing to be invited to an evening party in London, and quite another to be admitted to the small and intimate circle now frequenting Lowry Place. "I think Mr. Balasso has acted very discreetly," said Mary. Whereupon my lady opened her eyes very wide, but said no more.

This took place whilst C \acute{E} nونe was accompanying her father back into the hall to say "good-bye." She had hardly said a word as yet to the others.

"You're a good girl, Nona," said her father, pausing at the door to kiss her forehead. "And you will see how right I was to urge you to come here. I know best about such matters, little one."

"I have kept my part of the bargain; keep yours, papa. Take me away after two days. Take me across the sea!"

Balasso nodded, and patted her cheek, half kindly, half impatiently. "Good-bye, little white pigeon!" he said, waving his hand as he stepped into the hired carriage which had brought him from the Elcaster railway station, and was waiting to convey him back hither.

Enone stood for a little while at the open door, looking, not after her father, but straight out before her. As she turned to go into the house she encountered Vincent Maude face to face.

If she had seen some fierce and terrible wild creature instead of the kindly English gentleman who smiled down on her and held out his hand, she could scarcely have shrunk back with a more scared and startled face. "Are you here?" she said in a low breathless voice. "I did not know! I would not have come!" Then suddenly she ran back to the door and called "Papa! Come back, papa!"

But the carriage was already out of sight, as she looked down the long empty wintry avenue.

Maude came close up to her. "Nona," said he, "what is the matter, my child?"

"I did not know you were here," she answered, with the same scared look, and faint, breathless voice.

"And my sudden appearance startled you? I see."

She let this explanation pass, but did not confirm it by a word or a gesture.

"None," said Maude, looking down with tender compassion on her drooping eyelids and wan, dejected young face, "are you warmly dressed enough to take a turn with me for a few minutes, here on the gravel walk?"

"Yes."

"Come, then; I have something to say to you. It is a secret to most people as yet, but you and I are such old friends that I want to tell it to you myself."

She passively let him take her hand and place it on his arm, and paced along the shrubbery path by his side.

"Now, Nona, what I want to tell you, is——"

"I know it," she said without looking up.

"You know it?"

"I know what you have to say. You are going to be married."

"Why, what a wonderfully keen-sighted little Nona!"

"You are going to marry Miss Lowry. You have loved her a long time. The instant I saw you here I knew how it was."

"Yes; you have guessed aright, Nona. I wanted to tell you this news myself, because I thought you liked me well enough to be pleased at hearing how happy I am. You are right, too, in saying that I have loved Mary a long time. I have loved her ever since I was a young subaltern;—and that's ages ago, Nona, for I am getting to be quite an old fellow; almost old enough to be your father."

She walked on beside him with a drooping head, and made no answer. But she understood him; she understood him well. Then he began to talk to her of her own fortunes, and the change in her life made by her father's arrival; of the pleasure she would have in foreign travel, now that she could see all the beautiful and artistic things of Southern Europe with means and leisure to enjoy them. He went on talking gently and cheerfully, not

seeming to expect a reply from her, but putting the bright side of her lot before her, until she gained self-command enough to look up and answer him.

"No doubt your father will take you to Athens, Nona?"

She shook her head. "No; I shall not go to Greece. Papa would take me there if I asked him; but I don't want to go to Greece."

"No? Why, how's that, Nona?"

"I want to go away from here, and I made Papa promise to take me;—but not to Greece. I want to keep one thing to dream about. All the realities of life seem so different from what I fancied. I suppose I have been a fool, and ignorant, as my father says. I thought my birthright made me something superior to common people,—and I was only more foolish and ignorant than the rest of the world. But still—I don't find my new wisdom such a very happy thing; and I don't want to see Greece except in my dreams."

She spoke in a sad, humble tone that went to Maude's heart. Poor little Nona! But it was better to speak cheerfully to her, and without too much tenderness or sympathy. Even if she thought him a little hard,—better so! But he need not have feared, or fancied,

that the girl would misapprehend him. There was scarcely a movement of his mind with regard to her that she did not divine. When they came near to the house again, she said that she would go in. As they parted on the steps, she gave him her thin little hand, and said humbly, "Thank you for telling me yourself."

The change that had come over CEnone was noticed by all those who had known her in Green Street. There was something subdued and resigned about her whole manner. Never loquacious, she was now almost mute; and her great luminous eyes had a wistful, appealing look in them. Many a coarse-grained speech of Lady Lowry's, which she would fiercely have resented a year ago, she now let pass, if not meekly, at least in silence.

My lady marked this improvement in Miss Balasso's demeanour, and considered it to be a very unaccountable phenomenon. "There never was such a queer, contrary"—(I am obliged to confess that my lady said "contrairy")—"disposition as that girl's," she observed to Mary. "When she was a pauper, as one may say, there was nothing to come near her uppishness. And now that she really might have a right to consider herself

somebody,—did you notice her collar and cuffs? Real Valenciennes, every thread, and uncommonly fine, too!—she is as mild and meek as anything! ”

Another peculiarity of C^Enone's manner was that she seemed to shrink from Mary Lowry. She avoided being alone with her, and even as much as possible speaking to her when others were present. And yet she would sit with her eyes fastened on Mary's face whenever she thought herself unobserved. And once when Mary happened to be out of the room, and my lady made some slighting remark about her to Wigmore, C^Enone suddenly flashed out: “ Miss Lowry is above the little crawling thoughts of the world. Her face is like her soul; and both have a beauty too lofty to please the vulgar.”

Amazement and dismay sat on every face. “ Upon my word!” said my lady. “ Oh, I see you haven't quite given up all that nonsensical, high-flown kind of talk that Sir Cosmo warned you against.”

But Percy, who had positively gasped at C^Enone's sudden attack, as if she had flung a cupful of cold water in his face, now made a stout protest.

“ Oh, come now, I say, Miss Balasso!

Jove ! You ought not to come down like that, don't you know ? I'm sure, as far as I am concerned,—although I do *not* go in for what you may call the 'lofty' style of thing ; —never did, and never shall, and don't mind sayin' so fairly, you know,—still I have the most sincere admiration and respect for Miss Lowry. Hang it all, you know ! ”

“ You speak your own praise in saying so,” answered OEnone with perfect coolness and gravity.

So there was some touch of her old self left in her still. But my lady did not intend to allow OEnone Balasso's eccentricities, old or new, to divert her from the main object she had had in view in bringing the girl to Lowry Place. Indeed, my lady's purpose had grown into a devouring passion. She regarded all things and people either as means or hindrances to her end, and treated them accordingly. It was almost impossible to be in Lowry Place for half an hour without in some measure catching the infection. The search for the will seemed to draw the whole household into its vortex like a whirlpool. A feverish excitement ran through Lowry Place like an epidemic. My lady lost not an instant in arranging what she called “a little quiet

sayuns all to ourselves," in which she hoped ~~O~~none might be the means of obtaining important revelations from the deceased Sir Rupert. "Dr. Flagge is staying with our neighbours the Elcasters, — the Earl and Countess of Elcaster, you know; he will come over this afternoon before dinner if I send him a line. We can be quite undisturbed in my dressing-room. I want you to give me one more sayuns before you go," said my lady. Her tone was not quite so commanding as it would have been in Green Street; but still she showed plainly that she expected to be obeyed.

~~O~~none was almost passive. She was perhaps the only person in the house who appeared to have escaped the prevailing agitation. Flagge said a word or two to her privately before what my lady called "the sayuns" began.

"I don't believe they're going to find this will, Nony. Your dream didn't prophesy true, after all."

"It does not matter much now," she answered, with a quiet air of abstraction.

"Why not *now*? I guess it never did matter very much to you or me. But why not *now*?"

"Do you not see that she is so happy that she cannot care much about inheriting more or less money, nor what poisoned tongues say of her? He will love her just the same!"

There was a fibre in Flagge,—unscrupulous adventurer though he was,—that responded to this romantic simplicity. He never thought of suspecting, still less of despising, it as her father had done. "I thought long ago as there was something not of this dirty earth about you, Nony," he said. And as he looked at her his eyes were moist. The emotion was genuine; but it did not prevent him from adding, "Well now, Nony, I reckon it's about time to play the last card. Lady Lowry has pretty nearly ransacked this house all she can. I shall tell her to-day to look in the walnut desk once more, on Sir Rupert Lowry's authority. You won't mind that?"

"They have searched it, you say, already?"

"Miss Lowry and that old lawyer have searched it, of course. It was the first place they'd look in. And I guess if 'twas there Mr. Flint would have found the will. He's a smart man."

The fact was that Flagge had already discounted Enone's dream to a great extent, although he had not mentioned her name in

the matter. He had represented to my lady (with what flights of fancy and strength of colouring he judged best calculated to impress his auditor) that Sir Rupert had appeared to him (Flagge) in a vision, and had desired that a minute search should be made in Lowry Place: promising, if his behest were complied with, to reward his daughter-in-law's faith with more precise revelations. And Flagge had kept in reserve the walnut desk as a last resource, when it should be impossible to draw any more subsidies from my lady by putting off the discovery.

"Come," said Sarah, running into the room, "are you ready? I have only this moment got away from the luncheon table. Miss Lowry asked for you," to OEnone, "and I told her you were in my room."

"But Dr. Flagge cannot mesmerize me now," said OEnone. "If that is what you want, it is impossible."

Sarah did not understand her. "Oh come, Miss Balasso," she said, "I can't suppose you will disoblige me just at the last! I'm sure Mr. Balasso could have no objection. I heard the other day of the Honourable Miss Bullaby, who was quite a celebrated clairvoyante, and she had been a Maid of Honour!"

"Let me try, won't you, Nony?" said Flagge in a low voice.

Œnone seated herself quietly in an arm chair, and fixed her eyes on Flagge as she used to do. She was perfectly calm, almost listless. But all Flagge's coolness seemed to have deserted him. His hand shook, his eye was unsteady. Lady Lowry sat by, anxious and impatient. It would not do. Flagge got up from his chair, and walked across the room tossing his hair back with his hand.

"There's an adverse influence," said he. Then he looked uneasily at Œnone. There was a sentiment at the bottom of his heart which made him shrink from proceeding to downright lies and trickery in her presence, now.

"Nona!" cried a fresh young voice at the door. "Are you there? Aunt Mary says you *must* have some luncheon."

Flagge caught at the interruption, and made my lady a sign not to detain Œnone.

"You'd best go with Miss Rosamond," said he, hurriedly. "Pray go."

"I do not want to eat."

"But beef tea isn't eating!" cried Rosamond, showing her blooming face at the door. She gave a look of amazement at Dr. Flagge,

whom she had by no means expected to see there. But she did not linger. "Come, Nona!" she said, and drew her friend away, shutting the door behind her.

That evening, after dinner, my lady made a grand *coup*. She solemnly requested Mary's permission to make another search in the study. Mr. and Mrs. Flint were dining there, and Sarah would rather have taken another opportunity of making this demand. But there was no help for it. Time enough had been lost, as it was; "and if I wait until those Flints are out of the way," said my lady to herself, "I may wait a pretty long time, for there's scarcely an evening that one or the other or both of 'em don't poke their noses in at Lowry Place. Ah! Well, I shan't allow that when *I* live here."

"You know that the study has been thoroughly searched," said Mary, in answer rather to Mr. Flint's raised eyebrows than to Sarah.

"I know you have looked there."

"I promised Lady Lowry," said Mary, speaking to Mr. Flint—to my lady's unspeakable indignation: what had *he* to do with it?—"that she should search wherever she pleased throughout my house, if

that would tranquillize her mind and my brother's."

Sir Cosmo sniffed. "I can't say I have found all this hullabaloo, and farce of ransacking the premises, particularly tranquillizing to *my* mind," he said. "But I'm much obliged to you for your kind intentions."

"I should scarcely think Miss Lowry has found it tranquillizing to her mind, either," observed Mr. Flint with irrepressible indignation. "But I agree with you, Sir Cosmo, in thinking it a farce. Sir Rupert Lowry's will reposes safely enough in the Register Office at Doctors' Commons."

"We shall see!" said my lady.

Miss Lowry gave the signal to rise from the table, and the company left the room altogether, except Sir Cosmo, who remained behind to smoke a solitary cigar. Rosamond drew C^Enone's arm within hers, and whispered, "What is going on? Lady Lowry seems to be in a wonderful state of excitement! Has that horrid Dr. Flagge been making any more mischief?" But C^Enone's eyes were fixed on Mary Lowry as she listened, with a faint sweet smile, to some words which Vincent Maude was pouring into her ear, and she made no answer to Rosamond.

"There's no time like the present," said my lady resolutely. "Will you have lights taken into the study, Mary?" Then, half turning round with an insolent air to the others, she said, "Since you *are* here, you may as well be witnesses."

"Mad!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint with raised hands and eyes, and in no very subdued tone of voice. Then the whole party entered the study, where a fire was burning, and into which James had brought a lighted lamp.

And now all eyes were turned on Lady Lowry, who marched straight up to the walnut-wood desk and opened it with a key which Mary had given her. There were a few packets of neatly docketed papers lying on a blotting pad. In the drawers, which my lady pulled open one after the other, were the vellum-bound volumes of accounts of which mention has also been made.

"Was there nothing else here?" asked my lady, turning round to Mary with rather a blank face.

"There were a few letters, which have been sorted and tied up, and which I think you have already seen in the library."

"Well," said Sarah, "I must look through

these packets, I suppose, if there's nothing else."

"I examined the papers tied up there in Miss Lowry's presence," said Mr. Flint. "They are chiefly receipted bills, as far as I remember. There is also a warranty for a horse, and an estimate from a builder in Elcaster for some alterations in the stables which Sir Rupert thought of making."

"Oh yes; I dare say it's all right. But I shall look through them," said Sarah.

She seated herself in front of the desk, and began to untie the packets.

Mrs. Flint, with another uplifting of hands and eyes, sank into an arm chair by the hearth. Maude drew his chair near to Mary's. The two girls and Mr. Flint placed themselves behind my lady, watching her as she unfolded paper after paper. No one spoke. There was scarcely a sound to be heard except the crackling of the fire, the beat of the wintry rain on the window-panes, and the rustling of the papers in my lady's fingers. So breathless was the silence, that a low, scratching sound at the door made every one start; and *Con*one looked round solemnly, as if she were prepared to see a supernatural visitant. But it was only poor old Con, who had followed his

mistress, and, being admitted by Maude, went and laid himself at her feet, and watched the proceedings with his nose between his paws.

The packets were all examined one by one.

No result!

Then Sarah opened the vellum-covered account-books, shook them, turned them this way and that, and placed them on the blotting-pad beside the papers.

There remained now only four side drawers. My lady stood as if nervously irresolute for a moment before trying this last chance. But all at once a thought struck her. "There may be some secret drawers," she said, "or a false bottom, or something." She tapped on the solid old-fashioned cabinet work as she spoke, as if expecting it to sound hollow. But this possibility beyond seemed to give her courage to proceed with her investigations. It was not quite the last cast of the die. She thrust her arm to the back of the deep side drawers, and pulled out their contents. These consisted of old rusty keys, a broken spur, one or two empty cigar boxes, and a flat morocco case tied round with a broad black ribbon. Into this band of ribbon was stuck a large square envelope with an inscription on it in a crabbed, tremulous hand-writing.

"What's this?" cried my lady, pouncing on it.

"That," replied Mary, "is my mother's miniature——"

"But this,—*this!*!" pulling out the envelope from the band.

"Those are letters from my mother to my father. He must have been looking at them the night before his death. I found the cover and the miniature just as they are now. You can see the inscription for yourself: 'Letters from Mary.'"

"Oh! Is that Sir Rupert's handwriting? Well, I may as well look through these, since I am about it."

"This is monstrous!" exclaimed Mrs. Flint. Her husband checked her: but my lady took not the least heed of her.

"I ascertained, before replacing the cover, which is not fastened, as you see, that it contained only about half a dozen letters in my mother's writing. They must have been all she ever wrote to him in her life," replied Mary.

"Did you read them?"

"Read them! No! I found them here on the morning after my father's death. From that time no hand has touched them."

"I shall look through them," said my lady resolutely.

"Really, Lady Lowry," said Maude, stepping forward, "there can be no necessity for this! Mary's feelings ought to be respected. Those letters are sacred in her eyes."

"It's time *somebody* interfered!" said Mrs. Flint, disregarding her husband's signs to her to be quiet.

"Do you mean to break your word?" asked Sarah, looking defiantly at her sister-in-law.

"No; it shall be as you wish. But understand that after to-night this must end."

Sarah turned her back abruptly, and seating herself once more at the desk, proceeded to examine the contents of the envelope. All her varnish of gentility had disappeared. She was rude, intense, unaffected.

"Aunt Mary," whispered Rosamond, "may I see my grandmamma's picture?"

Mary opened the case, and the others gathered round to see. As they stood so, they heard Lady Lowry mutter, "'My dear Vincent?' Who is this from?"

"What!" exclaimed Mary.

"It's signed with your name, 'Mary Hovenden Lowry.' But there's something else folded up with it." The next instant she

gave a shriek and started to her feet. “*I have found it!*” And then she sank back on to her chair, panting, and clutching a paper in her hand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

At this moment Sir Cosmo and Percival Wigmore appeared at the door. "What is the matter? Is Sarah ill?" asked the former, glancing round with a startled face.

Mr. Flint had seen that the document, which my lady clutched convulsively in her hand, was a sheet of common blue ruled paper; and it flashed on him in a moment that such was the paper described by Quickit as having been witnessed by him.

"Lady Lowry is not ill," said Mr. Flint, "only agitated. She thinks she has made an important discovery. Allow me."

He took from Sarah's fingers the paper she held, and glanced at it. "By G—! she *has*, too!" he exclaimed after a second.

"What?" cried Cosmo, looking almost scared.

"What do you say now, Cosmo?" burst out my lady excitedly. "Oh, your poor dear

father will be able to rest in his grave now !
The will ! I have found the will, Cosmo ;
I have found it ! ”

“ Is it so, Mr. Flint ? ” asked Mary.

“ Yes, Miss Lowry ; to the best of my belief it is so,” answered Mr. Flint, wiping his forehead. He was in a violent heat notwithstanding the wintry temperature.

“ I am most thankful ! ” said Mary earnestly.

My lady broke out again, triumphant, excited, with flushed cheeks and roughened hair. Mrs. Bolitho would scarcely have recognized her pupil. “ Oh, it’s very well to say you’re most thankful, now it’s too late to be anything else ! But it wasn’t your fault if that will was not buried and hid for evermore. No, I *will* speak, Cosmo ! If it hadn’t been for me it would have lain huddled up there with a lot of rubbishing old letters. Mary’s feelings were too fine to have them looked at. Oh yes, Sarah was to be sneered down by Miss Lowry’s friends, wasn’t she ? Ha ! What do you say now ? Your poor dear father, Cosmo, kept telling us over and over again to have faith and persevere ; but nobody paid any attention to what he said, but me. Nobody, nobody ! ”

“ Sarah, keep cool ! You’ll do yourself

an injury," said Cosmo, placing his hand on her shoulder, and making her resume her seat.

"I say," put in Wigmore, "she ought to have some sal volatile or something. She'll get hysterical."

"Be quiet!" cried my lady roughly.
"You're not required to interfere."

Mrs. Flint murmured something about a strait-waistcoat and the county asylum. Percy stared in bewilderment at this revelation of the fair Sarah's unvarnished self. Cosmo was white to the lips, and trembling violently. The others looked shocked, amazed, dismayed, in their different degrees; but no one spoke, until Mr. Flint, who had been examining the paper in his hand with the closest attention, said, "Sir Cosmo and Miss Lowry, I believe this to be indeed the veritable last will and testament of your late father, Sir Rupert."

"Of course it is!" cried Sarah. "I should like to catch any one trying to say it isn't!"

"It is signed by two witnesses. The name of one of them,—Thomas Wright,—is unknown to me. The other is Mark Antony Quickit."

"There, Cosmo!" interrupted Sarah once more. "Oh, the dear, blessed spirits! You

hear? Read the will. Read it at once in the presence of witnesses!"

"Is it your wish that I should do so, Sir Cosmo and Miss Lowry?"

"Yes," replied Mary.

Cosmo seemed unable to articulate a reply; but he bowed his head in assent. There was profound silence for a second or so, and then Mr. Flint said, "This document, Sir Cosmo, was discovered by your wife, Lady Lowry, a few minutes ago, wrapped up together with a packet labelled, in your father's handwriting, 'Letters from Mary.' The packet contained, besides some half-dozen letters from your mother, one other, which is, I think, in Miss Lowry's hand." He held it out to her, and as she took it she whispered to Maude, who was close beside her, "My poor farewell letter to you, Vincent! My father had kept it all these years!"

"I am inclined to believe," continued Mr. Flint, "that Sir Rupert, feeling, as he said in that last letter to me, some presentiment of his approaching death, had been looking over his papers, perhaps re-reading old letters, and recalling past times with some tenderness, as a man might who felt that the world was nearly over for him. And I believe that he

inadvertently folded up the will with that letter of his daughter's."

"What's the good of all this talk?" cried my lady coarsely. "We all know that Sir Rupert never meant to hide the will,—whoever else might! It may have been somebody's interest to poke it away there;—but it wasn't poor dear Sir Rupert's intention to do so."

Flint turned upon her sternly. "I advise you, Lady Lowry, for your own sake to show more moderation and decency," he said.

"Oh, I say, you know," put in Wigmore, "you must make allowance for Lady Lowry bein' upset and excited. Come now, Lady Lowry," said the little man, who looked genuinely distressed, "you're not yourself, you know, or you wouldn't talk so. You don't mean anything offensive against Miss Lowry, do you, now? You've too good a heart, don't you know!"

"Don't you trouble yourself about what I mean, or what I don't mean. Them the cap fits, let them wear it. As to Mr. Flint's impertinence, I take it from whence it comes. I have carried out my duty in spite of the whole crew of them. And of course that is displeasing to certain persons." Then addressing herself to Mr. Flint with imperious insolence,

" We don't require any more of your comments, sir. You'd better read the testament at once, and have done with it ! "

Mr. Flint looked full at her for a moment. Then he said firmly, "*I will, madam.*"

There was a thrill of intense expectation throughout the little circle. Cosmo passed his handkerchief nervously across and across his white lips. My lady fixed her round bright eyes fiercely on the lawyer. He began by reading aloud the usual formal preamble; then followed one or two legacies to old servants, precisely the same as those contained in the former will; then, in a low, distinct voice, Mr. Flint went on as follows:—

" I give and bequeath to Leonora, wife of John Northam Peppiat, of Nelson Place, Bloomsbury, the sum of two thousand pounds, in acknowledgment of her humanity towards the neglected and sole surviving child of my son Cosmo.

" Further, considering that my aforesaid son has a second time deceived his family and disgraced his blood by a marriage, the knowledge of which accidentally reached me on this day, I hereby revoke and cancel all my former testamentary dispositions in his favour, which I was mainly induced to make by the

generous intercession of his sister; and as to the residue and remainder of all my real and personal estate, I give, devise, and bequeath the same absolutely unto my excellent and dearly beloved daughter, Mary Hovenden Lowry, as some poor amends to her for the years of her youth sacrificed to filial obedience; and I humbly pray Almighty God to bless her.

"And I hereby appoint Samuel Flint, of Elcaster, and George Akroyd, of Clevenal, or the survivors of them, executors of this my will. As witness my hand this fifth day of July, 187—."

Then followed the attestation clause and the signatures of the witnesses.

For a few seconds after Mr. Flint's voice ceased, there was a dead silence. The tears were streaming down Mary's cheeks as she sat holding Vincent's hand, and Mrs. Flint had her handkerchief to her eyes. Sarah's face wore a strange, stunned look. She put up her hand to her ear like a deaf person. "Well?" she said, with her eyes still fixed on Mr. Flint. "Why don't you go on? That's not all." Her voice was faint and muffled.

"That, Lady Lowry, is all."

"But what is it, then? I don't understand. I can't hear. What is Cosmo to have?"

"I—I shall dispute this—this document, Mr. Flint," stammered Cosmo. His hands shook, he gasped for breath, and his lips could scarcely frame the words he tried to say. "It's a monstrous—monstrous iniquity."

Mr. Flint silently shrugged his shoulders.

"What do they say, Cosmo? I don't understand. I can't hear," whimpered Sarah. Then all at once she uttered a series of piercing cries, and fell back in a fit of violent hysterics. They carried her to her bed, and sent for Dr. Akroyd, who shook his head gravely when he saw her, and announced that he should remain at Lowry Place all night. Hours passed before Sarah recovered consciousness. She fell from one hysterical convulsion into another. And when the wintry morning light began to whiten the window panes, it fell upon a dead infant prematurely born. But the mother's youth and strength had triumphed, and she was safe.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE world continued to talk about Dr. Flagge, the celebrated medium, long after the story of Sir Rupert Lowry's missing will was forgotten, save by the few persons nearly interested in it. Dr. Flagge had kept himself before the public. The affair of the will was a famous advertisement for him. He was received by sovereigns and caressed by the aristocracy of the Continent in general, and Paris in particular.

He left England soon after the discovery of Sir Rupert's will, and travelled, mainly on the Italian Riviera, and in other parts of the South of Europe which are celebrated for their mild winter climate. He was to be seen constantly at all the places frequented by a stout smiling gentleman with gorgeous rings and shirt-studs, and his pale invalid daughter. One year, indeed, Dr. Flagge went up the Nile in the wake of their boat. Another winter he spent in Rome, and afterwards wrote a work about it, in part mystically

spiritistic, in part socially scandalous, and wholly ungrammatical, which met with considerable success. That year was marked in Rome by the conversion to Catholicism of the rich Levant merchant's daughter, Miss Enone Balassopoulo, who afterwards took the vows of a severe religious order and entered a convent in the South of France, where the arid melancholy plain steeped in sunshine stretched before the barred windows of her whitewashed cell for many a weary mile. Before she took leave of the world, she wrote a letter to Mary Maude, of which the last words were, "I have found a stronger shelter than my own poor pride, a better rest than Nirvana. Do you remember? Farewell."

Shortly afterwards it was announced in one or two of the public prints that Dr. Flagge, the celebrated medium and gifted author of that sparkling and poetic volume entitled "*Cavolo Romano*," intended to leave Europe on a long and distant voyage. It was rumoured that he meant to rejoin the wild tribes of the West, amongst whom he had passed his youth, and from whom he had imbibed much of the romance and defiance of conventionalism which so strongly marked his singular character. So said the public prints which dealt in such

gossip. At all events, he disappeared, and the world, very naturally, forgot all about him.

But a small circle of quiet, happy folks in the country remembered him for many a year. He appeared one day unexpectedly at Lowry Place, and asked to see Rosamond, who lived there with her aunt. He was dressed in the deepest mourning, and looked so haggard, ill, and unhappy as to touch Rosy's warm heart at once.

"She's gone, Miss Rosamond," he said. "Nony's gone; same as dead to me. I'm a-going to leave this country and Europe altogether. I'm going to cross the big water, and I'd thank God if He'd let me drown in it. But I won't do anything violent nor wicked, if I can help it. She talked to me before—before she went away"—here his voice was choked by tears—"like an angel. She wasn't fit for this world. If the Lord wouldn't take her right up to heaven, why, she'd just got to shut herself up and wait a while longer. I see that was so. No; she never was fit for this wicked world. But it's—it's cruel hard on me. Well, I ask your forgiveness for coming to disturb you; but I want to beg a favour of you. You've got a photograph of Nony, Miss Rosamond. It's but a poor cheap

thing, took when she was at school, far's I remember. But if you will give it to me, just out of pity and kindness, I'd be more grateful to you than you know of!"

He obtained the photograph and went away, and Lowry Place saw him no more. The Peppiats sometimes said that they believed he must be dead; but Quickit, who had struck up quite a friendship with Captain Pep, and, together with Papa Czernovic and others of the old set, often discussed past times over a tumbler of whisky punch in Bloomsbury, shook his head and declared he would turn up again. "He's an elastic ball, sir, is Flagge. He was hit hard, no doubt, about the young lady; but he'll rebound and rebound again and again, will Flagge, sir, take my word for it!" But, perhaps, Mr. Quickit was chiefly inspired to say so by his vigorous spirit of contradiction.

Of the other chief personages whose fortunes have been chronicled in these pages, all that need be told may be made known by describing a little scene that happened at Lowry Place one bright June day five years after the finding of the will.

Mrs. Vincent Maude sits in the library reading a letter. The room looks much the same as when we saw it last, except that on the Turkey rug the contents of a box of toys

lie scattered, and that a fat puppy is exercising his mischievous teeth on a small, square-toed shoe, unobserved by his mistress, whose eyes are fixed on the letter in her hand.

To her enters our old acquaintance, Major Maude, booted and equipped for riding, but meanwhile serving himself as a spirited steed for a bright-eyed, rosy little fellow, who rides triumphantly on his shoulder, shouting "Dee up, papa! Dee—e—e up!" in a manner to satisfy his fond parents as to the robust condition of his lungs.

"Hush, Rupert. Run away to Cousin Rosy, or go and play with the puppy, my boy," says his mother. Then, looking up at her husband with fond, trusting eyes, she says, "Here is another letter from Sarah."

A shade darkens Vincent's cheerful face. "More complaints, I suppose, and demands for money?" he says.

"No, dear; not this time."

"No? What miracle has happened?"

"I don't know whether you will consider it a miracle, Vincent; but Sarah is going to marry again."

"To marry!"

"It is not very surprising, after all. She is quite a young woman still, and it is three years since poor Cosmo died."

"What valiant man is going to make *that* venture?"

"Some one in her own part of the world—a farmer, I suppose. Here is what she says: 'You will, perhaps, be surprised to hear that I have at length consented to bestow my hand on one who has been long and faithfully devoted. My parents urge me to accept him, and his means are quite satisfactory. Also his character and his manners quite the gentleman. He took a first prize last winter at the County Show for shorthorns, and is altogether everything that I could wish. I trust my new marriage may obliterate the remembrance of a former alliance which I must ever deplore, as connected with unmerited misfortunes. ("Ungrateful hussy!" ejaculated Maude.) But I shall be thankful to the last moment of my existence that I did *my* duty.'"

"Ouf! Well, thank goodness, my dearest, that this incubus will be lifted away from you. I make no doubt that she will withdraw the light of her countenance from you, now that she wants nothing more. Indeed, I wonder why she writes now."

"I think you will soon see that. I was almost between laughing and crying when you came in, Vincent. Sarah touches tender

spots in one's heart so roughly! And yet she is really ludicrously unconscious of it nine times out of ten. Just listen to this: 'His name—I seek not to mitigate it—is Budge. But after enduring for three years the trying and aggravating temper of one who bore such an aristocratic appellation as your brother, I cannot conceal from myself that happiness is not bound up with what name you go by. And at the request of Mr. Budge I shall drop my title. The last payment of the little pittance which you allow me as your brother's widow was made on the 20th of last month, and before the next falls due I shall have a home of my own, and be in an independent position. Mr. Budge means to keep a pony chaise for me, and a man out of livery, and I can truly say that I look forward to my nuptials with a tranquil heart. I shall become the bride of Mr. Budge on the 15th, and the money is not *strictly due* till the 20th. I admit this openly, because I wish to act straightforward and according to the ladylike principles in which I have been educated, and which have always enabled me to do my duty under the most *trying* circumstances. At the same time, if you think it due to yourself, as a mark of respect for your brother's memory, to pay

over the whole of the last quarter at once, without deducting those five days, the money will come in useful for my clothes; and I *cannot* but think you would wish your only brother's lawful widow to make a creditable appearance.' What am I to do, Vincent?"

"Whatever your own feeling prompts, my darling."

"May I?"

"*May* you! Rupert, may not mamma do whatever she likes?"

"Es! And me, too, papa!" returns Master Rupert, who has just succeeded in rescuing the fragments of his shoe from the puppy.

"Then," says Mary, "I shall ask you to send a cheque for fifty pounds to Lambrook Manor Farm. And most thankfully do I look forward to Sarah's transformation from Lady Lowry to Mrs. Budge."

"Certainly. And may Providence have mercy on Mr. Budge!"

THE END.



